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IN THE NICOBAR ISLANDS



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A GROUP TAKEN AT NANCOWRY.

The necklaces, of leaves torn in strips and plaited, worn by three of the men, mark that they have been engaged in some holy (or unholy) work, as in propitiating or scaring the troublesome evil spirits.

# IN THE NICOBAR ISLANDS

THE RECORD OF A LENGTHY SOJOURN IN ISLANDS  
OF SUNSHINE & PALMS AMONGST A PEOPLE PRIMI-  
TIVE IN THEIR HABITS & BELIEFS & SIMPLE IN  
THEIR MANNER OF LIVING, WITH A DESCRIPTION OF  
THEIR CUSTOMS & RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES & AN  
ACCOUNT OF THEIR SUPERSTITIONS, TRADITIONS &  
FOLK-LORE

BY

GEORGE WHITEHEAD, B.A.

AUTHOR OF

"CAR-NICOBARESE GRAMMAR & DICTIONARY"

WITH A PREFACE BY

SIR RICHARD C. TEMPLE, BART., C.B., D.L., C.I.E.

Sometime Chief Commissioner of the Andaman  
& Nicobar Islands

Editor of *The Indian Antiquary*

WITH MANY ILLUSTRATIONS & A MAP



London

Seeley, Service & Co. Limited  
196 Shaftesbury Avenue  
1924

Printed in Great Britain

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WHI-I

*The Riverside Press Limited, Edinburgh*

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

IT is with some diffidence that I give to the world this account of one of the smallest and most primitive races of the earth. I have however been encouraged to do so on many sides, and not least by the way in which the learned editor of *The Indian Antiquary* has spoken of my "Folk-Tales of the Car Nicobarese," which appeared in that magazine last year, and which are now added as an Appendix to this work.

We all of us owe much more to our predecessors and neighbours than we are aware of. What we have learned directly from them, we often imagine to be the result of our own independent study and investigation. Again, how often we all make "new discoveries" of things which have been known to others for many ages past! However, I am very conscious of the debt I owe to Messrs E. H. Man and R. F. Lowis, late of the Andaman Commission—to the latter for his kind personal assistance and suggestions when I was beginning my study of the Car Nicobarese language and people; and to the former for the help I was able to get from his Grammar of the widely differing Nancowry dialect. But far more than to all other books put together, in my Nicobarese studies I have been indebted to the remarkably full "Report on the Census" (*Census of India, 1901, vol. iii.*: "The Andaman and Nicobar Islands"), by Col. Sir R. C. Temple, Bart., C.I.E., at that time Chief Commissioner of the islands.

I also owe very much more than my sincerest thanks to Mr E. H. Man, C.I.E., for so generously supplying me with a series of such excellent photographs; indeed without his aid this book could hardly have been published. After a strenuous life of some thirty years in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Mr Man retired from active service in 1901, long before I first visited the islands; so that I had no claim at all upon him beyond that of being a disciple and fellow-worker in

the same field. Most of the other few photographs have been supplied to me by my old friend the Rev. James Low, formerly Chaplain at Port Blair; to him also I tender my sincerest thanks.

Most of the matter in this book has never before appeared in print, but was gradually accumulated by me in my daily life in Car Nicobar. Some parts of it are in the main a mere translation of matter which the school children wrote in essays, in their own tongue; and my indebtedness to them is very great; but most of all I am indebted to Mr John Richardson, a pure Nicobarese, who, after being for some time in the mission school at Mus in Car Nicobar, was for five years a student in our school at Mandalay, Upper Burma. John Richardson was then for ten or eleven years catechist and schoolmaster in the mission, as well as *non-diplomaed* physician and surgeon in the island; for a considerable time he also officiated very creditably as Government Agent, during the furlough of the Agent. He has now officially resigned his connection with the mission, and is the *pucca* Government Agent of the island, and *tahsildar* with third-class magisterial powers. Without his aid, so liberally and ably given, I could not within the time at my disposal have attempted, much less have accomplished, more than a fraction of the translation work I have done; nor indeed could I have prosecuted my studies of the language and of the life and customs of the people to any great depth.

This work is not dedicated *Pueris virginibusque*. I have endeavoured to give as full and true an account of the life and conditions of the Car Nicobarese as lay within my power; and though I cannot accept the Gallic proverb "Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner," I trust that fuller knowledge will give fuller sympathy with one's brother, though he be a dark-skinned barbarian of the shores of Eastern seas.

G. WHITEHEAD.

## FOREWORD

**F**OR ten years I was Chief Commissioner—that is, Administrator on behalf of the Government of India—of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal, and also Superintendent of the great Penal Settlement at Port Blair in the Andaman Islands. I made it part of my duties to study the indigenous populations in my charge—their habits, manners and languages. But this was more than twenty years ago, and I feel some diffidence in writing now this Foreword to Mr Whitehead's book. During my time a missionary agency was established in Car Nicobar, and subsequently for a while Mr Whitehead filled the post with great credit to himself and for the material benefit of the inhabitants of that island. I have read his book with the greatest interest, and it has brought back to my memory many a forgotten scene and many a recollection of individuals formerly of my acquaintance.

Mr Whitehead's observations on the people of Car Nicobar bring to the notice of the careful reader a true picture of the life of an isolated semi-civilized society. Separated from the world, separated except for occasional visits by the men even from the other islands occupied by their own kith and kin, their interests are limited to their own families and to their neighbours on a small island. Except in a dim way they can realize no other race or population. Mr Whitehead brings vividly before us what a people so limited in outlook do with their lives. And he effects more than this. The Nicobarese are immigrants to the lands they occupy, migrating at some period before the Christian era from Further India, from what are now the lands occupied by the Burmese, Talaings



(Mons), Shans and Malays. They are in fact an offshoot of a Mongoloid race that has grown up without outside interference by, or contact of any material consequence until quite recently with, any other race of human beings. Contact of a kind there has been with the world in general for at least two thousand years, but it has never been such as to intervene seriously between the people and their ancient customs. We have then in the Nicobarese the old Mongoloid wanderers much as they were in the early days; in studying them we are studying the rudiments of the manners, customs and habits of the great races that now occupy China, Indo-China and the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago—in fact, the whole Far East—the Extreme Orient of the French. A study of the Nicobarese is of importance therefore, and students of things Oriental should be glad of such first-hand accounts of them as Mr Whitehead now brings before them.

What then is the picture he has painted for us? We are introduced to men and women occupying a tropical island which supplies them with the wants of life without giving them much trouble. They are therefore idle according to Western European ideas—that is to say, they follow the animal instinct of working in fits and starts, and only when work is a necessity of life, or for amusement. But when it is really necessary they work hard for a spell, and with intelligence. There is no doubt as to their possession of this last quality, though their cast of mind may, no doubt owing to their circumstances and surroundings, be described as bovine. Their intelligence is shown in their habit of settling every trouble by a kind of committee, and especially in a story told by Mr Whitehead of village headmen asking him to put down, as he was going away, the facts of the case regarding a clever rogue, so that his successor might

not be deceived. It is shown also in their fruit gardens, and in the adoption from the Danish missionaries of the form of fencing around them for keeping away the pigs.

The Car Nicobarese have learnt to supply themselves with their real wants, or perhaps rather to keep up the supply they brought with them—*e.g.* canoes, houses, arms, and so on. They know how to build good wooden houses and to keep their villages clean. They will not cultivate cereals, because the coco-nut supplies practically all their needs, either directly or as an article of barter. Also, because it acts as a sufficient currency, they have no use for money as Europeans understand it. The coco-nuts are their money, and though they will not cultivate in the European sense, they are quick at making gardens of fruit that grows easily. In judging such a people one has to take their circumstances into consideration.

Their circumstances govern everything in their civil life: a small population in a small island, without enemies, with no difficulty as to food, and in a hot climate requiring little or no clothing. They are therefore thoroughly democratic, their headmen are “naturally” chosen, and have not much authority and not much deference shown them. The land is owned by certain individuals and families; but its possession is not altogether an advantage to the owner, who has no idea of taxing anyone or of demanding any rent. There is no necessity for either. Their circumstances also govern the very hospitality of the Nicobarese, who are in general terms a community of friends. Such “justice” as is administered is generally the result of a meeting of a “committee” of the elders. But property—*i.e.* coco-nuts, houses, and so on—descends by heredity, and there is every sign of the elsewhere familiar custom as to property developing, did the circumstances demand it.

The conditions of the life have developed the character of the Nicobarese. His idleness is induced by his climate and circumstances, and in the daytime by the heat, and by his night habits. Very much of his work and his travelling, amusements and ceremonies—which are innumerable—he carries on at night. A people that is awake at night must sleep by day, a fact many European observers are apt to forget.

Circumstances again have had much to do with developing the Nicobarese character. He has never had reason to develop courage or to work continuously. He is truthful, and to a modern Westerner extraordinarily so, because he has had no reason to be frightened of telling the truth. He is honest, because there is no temptation to steal and misbehave in that fashion, but his human nature is there all the while, because he will steal from foreigners with little compunction, and deceive them without any twinge of conscience.

He is very fond of sport, and then fair in the extreme: his kindly nature pitying the loser while jubilating with the winner. He is an inveterate boat-racer, without any idea of betting or any object but the sheer sport of it. His sexual morality according to European ideas is lax.

Circumstances again govern the Nicobarese dress, which is the minimum generally. He does not require clothes. The name, "Nicobar," given by Orientals to his islands, means "The Land of the Naked"; and for a very long time the people were held to be tailed. This was due to the way in which the Nicobarese wears his loin-cloth. I have often seen it looking exactly like a tail wagging behind a man as he walked among the trees. But he is a vain man and will wear, on festival occasions for a short time, any clothes given him; several suits at once, with a black or white tall hat to crown them. The smallness of his life and surroundings makes him self-centred and

incurious about strangers. Often he would make no special effort to come to see the Government steamer arrive off his village. And yet he is extremely sensitive to ridicule of himself, or of what he considers as a shame cast on his family and dependents. A man has been known to commit suicide in the latter circumstances.

The food of the Nicobarese is governed by the produce of the island, but he now eats rice procured by barter for coco-nuts from elsewhere. His island has not much potable water, and his drink is chiefly the milk of young coco-nuts, procurable all the year round. The one thing the people do carefully is the climbing of the trees after the nuts, as carelessness is death or serious injury. This one condition alone shows how different the circumstances of life are in Car Nicobar from those obtaining in Europe.

But after all, the governing fact of the habits and customs of the Nicobarese is his belief, or religion if one likes to call it so. He is a pure Animist or believer in the spirits, chiefly of the dead, the most harmful being those who have died recently. The fear of these governs nearly everything he does; but, as in all spirit-ruled countries, the ghosts are fortunately easily deceived, and therefore governed by the living in their turn. On this idea are based the ceremonies for driving the spirits away, sending them adrift on the ocean, and feeding them. They must be either coerced or induced to good behaviour.

Fear of the spirits is always with the Nicobarese, and dogs his whole existence; his religious customs—*i.e.* his customs to circumvent the spirits—playing a large part in his life. They are practically all forms of exorcism in some way or other. His marriage is a simple matter; but his birth customs, including a mild form of *couvade*, are many, and all aimed at protecting the baby and its parents; and his death customs at

protecting the living from the dread newly created spirits, until the happy occurrence of the Ossuary Feast. This is held from time to time as a great happy festival, when the bones of the deceased, for say a year or more, are collected with many ceremonies, aimed at protecting the public, and reburied in a common grave; after which the spirits are harmless—a great point gained.

Fear of the spirits shows itself in many differing forms. All sickness is spirit-caused, and its treatment is simple exorcism of spirits, the people having but small idea of any other "medicine." Then again devil-scarers, usually called also simply "devils," are to be found in the houses of most islands, but not in Car Nicobar. These are images of all kinds, commonly used to protect the house. Also what was known to the Government officials as "devil-murders" were developed. The "devil-murder" was the killing of a man—generally with great cruelty and a callousness to suffering brought about by the childish unthinking mind of the Nicobarese—who had become so troublesome as to be declared by a formal secret meeting of village elders to be possessed of a devil and worthy to be killed. The whole idea was dead against Western law, and the Government had to put it down. I always felt, however, that the elders were first of all unprotected by us and left to their own resources, and secondly that it was their notion of "justice." So although the Government was obliged to put down the custom, the delinquents had to be treated with judgment and discretion. The procedure adopted, therefore, was to bring the actual murderers over to Port Blair, in the Andaman Islands, and keep them there until they were thoroughly frightened by their own superstition that the most dangerous spirit was that of a man who died away from home. The fear was mutual—on the part of the deported of dying in a

foreign land and so cursing his belongings left behind, and on the part of the latter, of the consequences of the deported dying before he returned. The procedure succeeded in its aim, and the "devil-murders" steadily decreased, delinquents being reported to the British authorities instead of being ceremonially killed.

Witches and witch-doctors, of course, exist, together with a curious system of apprentices, who are voluntary and need not take up the profession. With regard to these last, it has sometimes struck me that the custom of every boy of consequence in Burma having to do something in the way of entering a Buddhist monastery in early life may be due to an ancient Far Eastern custom of apprenticeship to an Animistic witch-doctor. The Nicobarese are, however, considerably sceptical of the value of the practices of their witch-doctors, which are certainly a stumbling-block to any kind of intelligent thought.

All kinds of things are done by the people to protect themselves from the spirits. *Tabu* exists in various forms—generally of things that are thought harmful to individual persons, but sometimes it is awkward in action. Words of the language, including names of persons and places, are constantly *tabued* for a time; and this leads to frequent and at times staggering changes in common words and in the names of places and people. Another result of *tabu* is the readiness to adopt any nickname, a custom that is prominently brought to the notice of European travellers. The Nicobarese, like the Indian, has a great objection to calling his relatives by their real names; and hence a nickname is, it will be seen, a very useful thing. Many common Indian superstitions are not of Hindu—*i.e.* Aryan—origin; and here again we may be in the presence of something aboriginal in the Further East.

Nicobarese dancing seems also to have a religious origin, especially when we find that the *ma-a-fāi*, or

witch-apprentice, has to dance for a while *every* night of his life during his apprenticeship.

The superstitions of the Nicobarese have been turned to commercial use by the inhabitants of one island, Chowra. It is a small island fairly centrally situated in the group, and has a population too large for it; but its people have settled the resultant difficulty by turning the island into a kind of sacred place, filled with a "witch" population very much to be feared, and then setting themselves up as the brokers for the whole group, through whom all island trade must pass on pain of every kind of supernatural trouble. It is some distance from Car Nicobar, and the dangerous visit thereto by the men for racing-canoes, pots and pans, etc., is a great yearly ceremony.

There is a custom of sacrifice, and also an annual ceremony of public thanksgiving to the spirits for favours during the year, which do not quite march with the other religious customs; though perhaps further inquiry may show a connection. But there is a practice of destroying one's own property as a revenge on an enemy, or on anyone who has caused a gross affront, that without doubt is a result of spirit-worship. The idea behind the practice is that such an action brings supernatural trouble on the persons who have done the wrong. Here again we have something that is also behind the Indian custom, now forbidden by British law, of "sitting *dharnā*," or even of suicide by way of revenge on another person.

I am afraid that I have given rather a long Foreword to Mr Whitehead's very valuable book; but if it has the effect of showing that he is dealing with a subject of unusual interest to anthropologists, and others who study the ways of mankind, I shall not have transgressed in vain.

R. C. TEMPLE.

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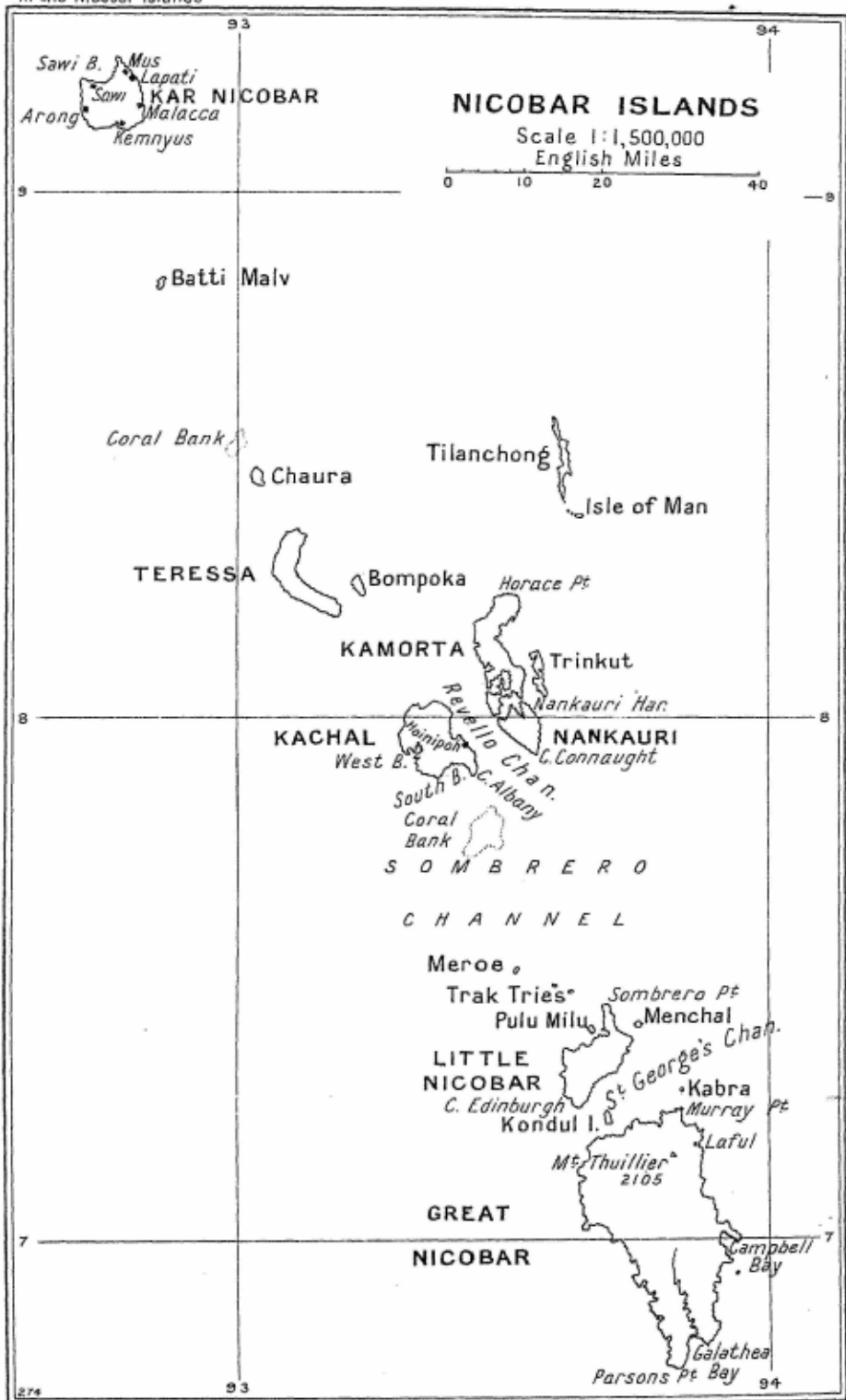


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"In the Nicobar Islands"



# IN THE NICOBAR ISLANDS

## CHAPTER I

### THE NICOBAR ISLANDS

**S**EPARATED from the Eastern Himalayas by a comparatively narrow gorge, through which flow the waters of the Brahmaputra, lies another centre of great mountain ridges, which sends out its branches to the east and south. The latter of these ranges, which constitutes the western watershed of the Irrawaddy basin, and which much farther south is known by the name of the Aracan Yoma, seems to die away gradually through a long chain of heights, some of them over 12,000 feet, until it terminates in Cape Negrais, a bluff of a few hundred feet in height. Yet the mountain range is of far more noble proportions than would seem, and its course is not yet finished, for it goes on in its southerly direction under the waters of the Bay of Bengal, and the tops of the mountains are seen as the Andaman Islands and the Nicobar Islands, which, though not very imposing on first sight, have within a comparatively short distance, on either side of them, to the east and to the west, more than 2000 fathoms' depth of ocean, whilst there is no great depth of water in the line north and south. Again the whole mountain range manifests itself in Sumatra, and is continued in the volcanic ranges of Java.

have exhausted the clay in their own island, and have now to go for it to the neighbouring island of Teresa, some ten or fifteen miles off.

These pots are of very varying size, from a few inches to two or more feet in diameter. The large pots are required for the cooking of bread-fruit and yams, and still more for the preparation of the *olla podrida* at their "Harvest Festival" (*Kun-señ-rö*). The manufacture of pots is tabooed in the other islands; yet despite the monopoly the price of pots is comparatively cheap, and it is on the profits of the canoe trade that the people of Chowra depend for getting their most valuable trade articles, such as silver wire and plated ware. As they have only sufficient coco-nuts for their own requirements, and consequently no external trade with foreigners, were it not for the canoe business they would have to do without their more expensive luxuries.

Half-way between Car Nicobar and Chowra, and serving as a most needful beacon to the Car Nicobarese on their way to or from Chowra, stands the rugged islet of Batti Malv (or *Kūñ-nö*, "The Little One," as the Car Nicobarese call it). It covers only some 500 acres, has no anchorage, and is uninhabited; but it is said to possess a beautiful kind of large pigeon *sui generis*. An interesting folk-tale gives the explanation of its rugged appearance (see *Folk-Tale*, No. V., p. 242).

The magnificent harbour of Nancowry, which is formed by the three islands of Camorta, Trinkat and Nancowry, is generally approached from the west; indeed the eastern entrances are not of the safest.

Until a few years ago the best Admiralty maps of the harbour are said to have been those of the famous buccaneer, Captain Kidd; but whilst I was in Car Nicobar H.M.S. *Investigator* was sent down to survey the harbour more carefully, as a few months previously the Royal Indian Marine troopship, *Northbrook*, which was serving as the station ship at Port Blair during the off season, had struck a rock right in the middle of the entrance of the harbour, which she and many other ships of equal draught had often entered without any suspicion of danger. When the *Northbrook* got into dock in Bombay for repairs it was found that she needed nothing beyond a little paint, as the coral had broken readily on contact with her. It was only after some little trouble that the *Investigator* found the rock that had caused the scare, for the pinnacle of the rock had broken off, and the water was very deep all round at the distance of the length of the long-boat. After a little blasting the entrance of the harbour was made really as safe for ships as it had ever been esteemed to be.

In Camorta are a few wild cattle which are descended from the animals introduced by Danish settlers and Moravian missionaries in the latter part of the eighteenth century; but native hunters and Europeans between them have reduced the stock very low. Similarly in Car Nicobar some years ago a few cattle of their own accord went off into the jungle and were lost to the mission. A few years later they appeared at the other side of the island as wild animals, doing considerable damage to gardens, and being a source of fear and danger to some of the people. As permission

was freely given to the village to kill and eat them, the trouble ere long passed away.

Katchall, which lies some ten or twenty miles west of Nancowry, has only a very sparse population—four to the square mile—though it has much land suitable for growing coco-nuts or grain. At one time it was intended to form a penal settlement here in connection with Port Blair, but with the prospect of the abolishing of the penal settlement altogether the scheme was of course dropped.

Great Nicobar, which is the most southerly of the islands, and covers a greater area than all the rest put together, has a very small population, which belongs, however, to two quite different tribes. The men of the interior, who are called Shompen, are very timid and wild, and would formerly never venture near any of the shore villages, but were at perpetual feuds with their neighbours. They would seem to be of Malayan origin. The men of this tribe go quite naked; the women wear bark-cloth petticoats. In this island alone do any of the hills rise over 2000 feet, and here alone are any of the streams worthy of the name of rivers. The vegetation is luxuriant and the forest timber valuable, and sundry rare varieties of orchids are found. Here also is found the *megapod*, a bird about the size of a domestic fowl, whose egg, which is laid in the hillocks of alluvial soil, is as large as a goose's egg.

Though the population is so small, and the islands are comparatively so near one another—the extreme north and south points being only just over 160 miles the one from the other—there are at least six clearly distinct dialects spoken in the Nicobar Islands: the

Car Nicobar, Chowra, Teressa, Central, Southern and Shompen varieties of one language indeed; but so different are the various dialects that Hindustani, or even English, has sometimes to be used as the medium of communication between the natives of the different islands. Yet the Nicobarese cannot be called a stay-at-home people, for not only have many of the elders of Car Nicobar been to Chowra and Nancowry, but some have been to Port Blair, Rangoon, Maulmain, Calcutta, Madras or Penang; whilst other Nicobarese have gone away with traders to Manicoi, the Laccadive Islands, Maldivé Islands, or Cocos Islands. A brother of the headman of Mus, being disappointed in love, went abroad and never returned. The last time he was heard of he was in England.

The Nicobarese have a remarkable, child-like faculty for picking up any foreign language, and often in addition to their Nicobarese names, which they may change from time to time, have also English or Hindustani names—in the case of the older men these names were often given them by the British sailors of a bygone generation who came to the islands in small sailing vessels for coco-nuts. Naturally some of these names were complimentary, whilst others were given in derision. My old friend the headman of Mus was “surnamed” Offandi (*i.e.* Effendi, an Arabic term marking certain Government officials), whilst other names were Jemmy London, Friend of England, Young Brown, Old Tom Dixon, Mr Crow, Placksar (“Black” Sir), James Snook, Tom Noddy, Corney Grain, Sweet William, Donkey, Kingfisher, Cock Robin, Daud, etc., etc.



Formerly English people visiting the islands would give a glass of grog to some of the leading men (as they would also give biscuits and tobacco) in order to create a more friendly feeling between them and Europeans; but spirits have long been tabooed by the Government, on account of the avidity with which the people took to them. A friend of mine who was down at Nancowry many years before I ever dreamt of seeing the Nicobar Islands told me that on one occasion Jemmy London was most persistent in asking for a little drop more of spirit, and when my friend said, "Jemmy, you cannot have any more; you are already drunk"—"No!" replied in English this ordinarily naked barbarian, "I am not drunk; I am only half-seas-over."

Unlike the Andamanese, who are a Negrito race of a most backward type, without fixed homes—who were, indeed, when those islands were finally annexed by the British Government in 1856 still in the Stone Age, and whose powers of enumeration stop on reaching the number three, and who have never been known to plant an orchard or garden except under the direction of others—the Nicobarese are a Mongolian people, backward indeed, but of fair mental powers, with carefully constructed rainproof houses and productive gardens, and with language and ability to transact business dealing with tens of thousands of nuts—though, as is the case with most backward peoples, abstract numbers in themselves have no meaning for them.

The Nicobar Islands lie along the line of a very ancient trade—the route by sea between China and Western lands—so they have been known to the

world from early times. They are mentioned by Ptolemy the geographer (*circa* A.D. 140); whilst by the far-travelled Buddhist monk, I-Tsing (A.D. 672), they are spoken of as "the land of Naked People," though their women are mentioned as wearing girdles of leaves. Indeed the word "Nicobar" seems to be a corruption of the South Indian term *Nakkavaram* ("Land of the Naked"), under which name they are mentioned in the great Tanjore inscription of A.D. 1050; and the name has been regularly used from the time of Marco Polo (A.D. 1292) onwards. It was by the same name (in English)—viz. "the Naked People"—that my old orderly at Car Nicobar would speak of the Nicobarese. Of the origin of the prefix Car, as applied to the most northerly of these islands, I have never heard any probable explanation. According to the report of early travellers the Nicobarese had tails; and this legend persisted long. I imagine it arose from some sailors having seen a few practically naked Nicobarese vanishing into the jungle, with the tails of their most scanty of possible loin-cloths flying in their haste or dangling behind them in their leisure (see *Folk-Tale*, No. I., p. 239).

In the sixteenth century the Nicobar Islands would form part of the Portuguese possessions in charge of the Viceroy of Malacca; but we know nothing further, except that Portuguese missionaries were soon at work in the islands, and that there are a few Portuguese words incorporated in the language. In the early part of the eighteenth century the French Government seems to have laid some claim to the islands, perhaps owing to the valiant endeavour of French Jesuits to work in them, though they received little or no support

from France, and soon the mission perished. From 1756 to 1848 the Danes made several attempts to colonize the islands, forming a settlement on the malarious, marshy lands on the shores of the glorious land-locked harbour of Nancowry, in the central group; but each expedition ended disastrously.

From 1807 to 1814 the islands were in English possession, during the Napoleonic wars, and were then handed back by treaty to the Danes. Twice also the Austrians attempted to form a settlement, in each case without any permanent result. Then it was suggested that the Prussian Government should take up the islands; but in 1869 (after a sequence of cases of atrocious piracy), with the good-will of the Danes, the British Government took formal possession, and established in Nancowry Harbour a penal settlement subordinate to that of Port Blair in the Andaman Islands. The penal settlement was withdrawn in 1888, partly on account of the large amount of sickness generally prevailing, and also partly on account of the distance from Port Blair, and the consequent expense of rationing and policing the place.

The Nicobar Islands still continue to be in the charge of the Chief Commissioner of the Andaman Islands; and for more than thirty years there have been Government Agencies at Car Nicobar and Nancowry. The main duty of the Agents is to keep the peace between the natives and the traders who have come to the islands to barter rice, tobacco, hatchets, cloth, soup-plates, soup-ladles, large nickel or plated forks and spoons, fish hooks and lines, gramophones, etc., etc., for coco-nuts. It is the wish

of the Government to let the islanders manage their own affairs after their old customs; and the Agents are not expected to interfere with them or their decisions, unless it be some matter where there is either gross injustice, or some serious infringement of all civilized law and custom. With no powers beyond moral suasion, or the threat of an appeal to the Magistrate on his very infrequent and brief visits, the Agents must settle all disputes arising between hard, avaricious foreigners and the easy-going Nicobarese. The Agents are also port commissioners, the collectors of customs and other taxes, preventive excise officers, and health officers.

At Nancowry for many years the real Agent was a very capable Indian woman, who received a decoration during the war for driving the *Emden* out of the harbour. As she had not a single soldier or a rifle, not to speak of artillery, this might seem at first sight impossible. Though she knew very well that this was a hostile ship, the *Rani* (as she was often called) was not going to show the white feather and run away, but hoisted up the Union Jack, as she was wont to do whenever the Government ship came in on its occasional trips from Port Blair. Captain Müller thought that the hoisting of the flag was the signal for the commencement of hostilities; and though there were no signs of human occupation to be seen, excepting two or three small canoes and the same number of huts, it was possible that there might be some battery hidden in the jungle. So as there could be absolutely nothing gained by firing on the shore, taking no risks the German ship steamed away without delay.

The Agency at Car Nicobar has seen more changes.

Of the first Government Agent, Mr Solomon, who was also schoolmaster and catechist of the mission, Sir R. C. Temple, the Chief Commissioner, in a lecture given in 1899 before the Indian Section of the Society of Arts, said: "He is imbued with an untiring enthusiasm resting on a foundation of much common sense, and by the exercise of these qualities he has acquired a remarkable ascendancy over the people, used for their good. His reports form an invaluable series of anthropological remarks on the people from intimate knowledge at first hand. . . . Mr Solomon's efforts to keep up peace and good-will between village and village are practical. For instance, he took advantage of the late Jubilee to bring together two villages at feud, at a great feast held in honour of that distant Queen about whom they hear so much and understand so little."

The Agents have been mainly Indians; but once for some weeks the European missionary consented to act in a temporary vacancy; and on another occasion, for a much longer season, a Nicobarese, the catechist and schoolmaster of the mission, was in charge; whilst when I first became acquainted with the island the representative of the Government was a Burman, an ex-convict whom the Chief Commissioner had known personally in Burma, where the man had held a responsible post. But for him, alas, "the sight of means to do ill deeds had made ill deeds done." It was a bold action of the Chief Commissioner's; but success justified it. Under kind but strict surveillance the Burman did fairly good work; and after being reinstated in the good opinion

of his own people by his re-employment by the Government, and having held his office for two or three years with credit, he returned to his native land. Latterly, partly owing to the increasing work due to the collecting of an export duty on coco-nuts, an Englishman was appointed as Agent; but now, we understand, he has been promoted to be a magistrate on the Andaman Commission, and the aforementioned Nicobarese catechist and schoolmaster, having resigned all official connection with the mission, has been appointed Agent and *tahsildar*, with third-class magisterial powers.

The penal settlement of the Andaman Islands, with its dependency the Nicobar Islands, has its own laws and government, and the islands are not thrown open to the world. At least in theory, no person and no goods may either be landed there or taken away without the express written permission of the Chief Commissioner; and anyone, other of course than a native of the islands, may be deported without reason given. This seems a harsh and strange rule; but those who care for the people and who know the conditions of the islands are most thankful that it is so; and it would not be easy to point to a case where anything was done unjustifiably under these despotic regulations.

On one occasion there went down with me to Car Nicobar two Englishmen who had each spent a number of years in the East, the one in the army and the other as a planter. They were the representatives of rival English firms which, in the demand at that time for coco-nuts and *kopra* for making margarine, were

anxious to get concessions to work in the island. For very good reasons, and pre-eminently out of consideration for the interests of the shareholders, the Chief Commissioner declined their proposals. The one was permitted to go down to the group of islands, but had also to return with the ship; whilst the other, who had brought a very considerable amount of varied stores to Port Blair, was permitted to land at Car Nicobar with personal stores only and with his servant, though he was also permitted to stay, as a temporary measure, in the spare rooms of the Agency. The gentleman in question was unfortunately too well known in India—that is, too well for the success of his plans. Among the goods which he wished to land on this island, which is the flat top of a mountain in the sea, and which nowhere rises to many feet above the sea-level, was the apparatus for two artesian wells, which of course could never be of the slightest use in such a place, and which were probably only brought out to serve as the basis of a claim on the part of the firm to be in actual working, with extensive machinery, on the island. After a month or so, by the next boat, my friend went away, vowing vengeance on those who would not support him, as well as on those who balked him, but I never heard anything more of him.

The climate of the Nicobar Islands is hot and extremely moist, and fairly equable. The rainfall varies considerably from year to year, but is generally about 100 inches. As is ordinarily the case in Equatorial regions, the wet season is not so clearly demarcated as in lands nearer the tropics, and

though the wet season (the south-west monsoon) may be reckoned as from May to September, not infrequently one of these months may pass without rain, whilst there may be a heavy fall of rain in any of the other months. I have never seen elsewhere such magnificent sunsets as are sometimes experienced at Car Nicobar in the south-west monsoon. There is really no cold weather; though if there should be heavy rain with strong winds about the end of December, it is then felt to be cold and dreary and feverish. Even in February the slightest exertion, whether by day or by night, causes one to be bathed in perspiration; and one very rarely needs a rug or a blanket, unless it is both wet and windy.

Certain parts of the islands are very malarious, as, for example, the marshy land along that part of the Nancowry Harbour where the Danish colonists and Moravian missionaries in the eighteenth century made so many bold attempts to form a settlement. At certain times and seasons colds and fevers are endemic in the islands generally; yet, provided that one lives in a fairly open space which is kept clear of stagnant water and decaying vegetation, one who is not specially susceptible to fever may with ordinary care reasonably expect to be tolerably free from sickness while living in the island.



## CHAPTER II

### CAR NICOBAR

**A**FTER having secured from the Superintendent of the Penal Settlement at Port Blair, who is also Chief Commissioner of the Andaman Islands, a permit to travel down to Car Nicobar and to remain there, I communicated the fact to the captain of the Royal Indian Marine boat which was going thither, and was cordially welcomed and assisted by each and all. Some furniture had to be taken down, and a considerable amount of stores; for nothing can be purchased in the island excepting rice, which can be got from the traders unless there happens to be a deficiency in their supply, as was the case for some months in the earlier part of the war. Fortunately I was quite sure of tolerable quarters down there, and I was taking with me my South Indian cook-boy, who had been with me for some time.

The run from Port Blair, the settlement on the Andaman Islands, to Car Nicobar is about 180 miles, and ordinarily takes one from after dinner one evening to breakfast next morning. In a later trip, during the south-west monsoon, I was able to go by the R.I.M.S. *Northbrook*, a large and comfortable boat that did not take so long. On the other hand, the most terrible time I have ever experienced at sea has been when I was travelling by the *Sunbeam*, the original boat of Lady Brassey's *Voyages*. This was a very small

and slow boat, whose port-holes were so near the water that often they could not be opened even when one was in a harbour. When one remembered that when this boat was built it was considered a marvel of luxury and comfort, not only did one think of the degeneracy of these days when even the humblest passenger by sea or land demands comforts which princes and nobles of the past ages never dreamt of; one also felt the truth of the saying that the English people take their pleasures sadly.

The island of Car Nicobar is very flat. There is a low hill somewhere in the jungle in the uninhabited part of the south-west of the little island—I have seen it from the sea, but when I have been comparatively near to it it was not noticeable. Still, the island is very beautiful—densely covered with groves of coco-palms coming down to the water's edge, varied here and there with the *pandanus* (or *mellori*), the mangrove, the *casuarina* and other trees. There is in many parts a coral reef running at some little distance from the shore, whilst the surf breaks at a farther distance out. The high tide is normally only some three feet higher than low tide, so the general appearance is the same at all times. In the bright sunshine the colours are very vivid, and within about a quarter of a mile from the shore the light green waters of the "much-twinkling" ocean change into a dark blue.

The shape of Car Nicobar is very similar to that of Australia. The village of Mus, the quarters of the Government and of the mission, is on the east coast, about a mile south of the north-east cape, but quite close to the northern Bay of Sawi. Eight more villages

or "townships" (for the houses of each "township" are not all together in one group) successively lie along the east coast—Kinmai, Lapati, Tapoiming, Chokchuacha, Kenyuaka, Tamalu, Perka and Malacca. There is only one village on the north coast, Sawi; and one on the west, Arong; whilst there are two on the south, Kemnyus and Kakana. It is noteworthy that the Nicobarese when speaking among themselves now use quite different names for all the villages excepting Arong and Tamalu. I suppose that at some time or other the old names became taboo, and so were discarded. All the villages lie near the coast. The traders' quarters, the "village hall," the burial-ground and the dead-houses are always right on the shore, and are known as *el-panam*; the birth-huts are generally there too. The native houses are built in small groups, generally of from two to eight houses, each group (called a *tu-hēt*) belonging to one man, in his personal capacity or as representative of his sept; though in these days there are at Mus groups of houses which severally belong to different individuals, who are mutually independent, and who merely live together for convenience sake. All these groups of houses are not very far from the beach; they have the ground immediately around them freed from jungle and covered with sand, whilst there are good tracks from one *tu-hēt* to another.

On my first arrival in the island, as it was during the north-east monsoon, we anchored in Sawi Bay; and it was not long before we had around us quite a number of friends who had come off in canoes to meet us, though the Nicobarese have not the curiosity that

marks most nations. Sometimes when the ship is sighted there will be quite a large number of men at *el-panam*, on the beach, but nobody about two or three hours later. Perhaps they are afraid that there may be some goods to be conveyed to the Agency or elsewhere, and they have found that there is a possibility of sharing in the presents which will be given, without themselves taking the trouble of helping to carry them up from the beach. After breakfast we went ashore. The sea was remarkably calm, so we were able to step from the captain's gig on to the coral rock. This of course is very rarely possible, as the heave of the ocean would readily cause the sharp coral rock to cut a hole in the side of the boat. The skin of the sole and heel of the Nicobarese is remarkably thick and tough, for barefoot they can walk comfortably on the coral rocks, which the Indians and Burmese cannot do, though they also may ordinarily go about unshod.

Our little bight has a good stretch of sand for surf bathing, and on some of the trips of the ship from Port Blair there would be quite a number of visitors who were looking forward to the bathing. It is never advisable for only one or two persons to be bathing at a time, as the surf is no respecter of persons, and will toss about a high and heavy official, even though he be an expert swimmer, with no more consideration than if he were a piece of cork. When the sea is calm, during the north-east monsoon, the crest of the wave, as it comes in from where the sea breaks, is ordinarily perhaps four feet high; but during the south-west monsoon it is much more. Sometimes a series of high waves will be followed by a few of little volume, all

more or less evenly separated. Sometimes, however, one high wave will follow immediately on the top of another, as a friend of mine experienced who later on came to pay me a few days' visit; for while his head was down in the trough and his feet up on the crest of a huge wave which he had seen coming and had faced calmly enough, there came a second big wave which knocked his head down into the sand. Though somewhat dazed, fortunately he did not lose his self-recollection, but, coming out of the water, dressed and came back to the house, still blanched by his experience. He had before declined my offer to send some Nicobarese lads with him, but naturally he did not bathe again in the surf. I used occasionally, however, to bathe alone myself, as I found it difficult in that hot-house temperature to get the needful amount of exercise, though I was a good walker, and the paths were generally good; whilst after being for a quarter of an hour in the water, without any further endeavour on one's own part, one had received sufficient knocking about to serve for a day's exercise. On one occasion, feeling that I had already had sufficient beating about in the water, I wished to come out, but found that I could make no headway, as I could not stand, much less swim, against the backwash of each wave. Every time I was being carried out again, and my strength seemed gone, when to my utter astonishment the next backwash did not take me off my feet. There was now a sequence of small waves, and I was able to struggle slowly along, walking with the waves until I got to the beach. More than an hour must have elapsed before I was able to put on my few garments,

and I had not gone many yards before I met my Nicobarese friends, who had come out with lanterns (for it had now got dark) to look for me. When I got in I lay down and had a good night's rest, and I suffered no further inconvenience from my experience, excepting that I felt that duty, if not inclination, forbade my bathing in the surf any more.

On my first visit I was fortunate to go down with the Deputy Commissioner of the Andaman Islands, who is normally in special charge of the Nicobar Islands. This, moreover, was no ordinary visit, but a kind of extension by deputy of the great Delhi Durbar which, after his Coronation, our King held in the cold weather of 1911-1912. Now there is no direct taxation of the natives in the Nicobar Islands; nor is it probable that there can be any for many years to come, for (amongst other reasons) the people do not normally make use of money. There is, however, a tax of 3 rupees (=4s.) per annum to be paid by each foreign trader or servant for his licence to remain in the island; and latterly there has been a royalty levied on the exported coco-nuts, *kali* and *kopra*—the chief products of the islands. But though the natives do not make any payments to the Government, the Government makes presents to the people—tobacco and cheroots, sugar and biscuits, turpentine and castor oil (this last is supposed to be taken internally as a medicine, but the natives prefer to take it externally, rubbing their bodies with it as a protection against the weather—sun or rain); Epsom salts (the use of which is well known, though Eno's is much

preferred), boracic powder and balls of naphthalin. I questioned the Magistrate about the Nicobarese understanding the use of some of these, and especially about the use of naphthalin, and I was told that this last was used as an antiseptic, wounds being touched with it. Some of the remoter villages, however, did not know the use of naphthalin, for some days later, when their presents arrived at the village of Kemnyus, on the south coast, two young fellows challenged each other to test the quality of naphthalin as a food; and each ate several balls, with the result that their stomachs were utterly disorganised, and that they died in great agony. Formerly very limited quantities of spirits were given to the headmen; but the avidity with which it was taken, and the condition of the people (but especially of the other islands) after the visit of a Chinese junk, caused the rule of total prohibition to be established as to the import of spirit.

These presents are for the people generally; but each headman would receive a suit of clothes as a present for himself. On this occasion the suit was of the strong drill, khaki, of which the uniforms of the Indian police were made; and in addition there was given to the headman of each village a white top-hat, which the Magistrate had been able to purchase, for 1 rupee each (*i.e.* 1s. 4d.), in the bazaar at Aberdeen, the little native quarter of Port Blair. Though the ordinary dress of Nicobarese men approximates *nil*, being a loin-cloth which, despite its long tails, might well go into one's watch-pocket, they will at times put on great quantities of clothes,

and be proud of them. It is more or less *de rigueur* for a native, if he possesses the necessary clothes, to be dressed more or less fully after the English, Burmese or Indian style when he appears before a European; and once when I called on friend Offandi he called out in English down from his house, saying: "Wait a bit till I put on my clothes." Now the Nicobarese, though less tall, are of a much stouter build than the Indian policeman, and so some of the pairs of trousers were some eight or ten inches short of meeting round the waist of the Nicobarese headmen; but that would make no difference in the matter of being properly dressed. At one time the Government would take down quantities of Andamanese tea to give to the natives, and would show them how to brew it; but tea was quite at a discount in my time, as the Nicobarese could not understand how anyone could want any other liquid to drink when he could get the fresh coco-nut—excepting, of course, alcoholic liquor.

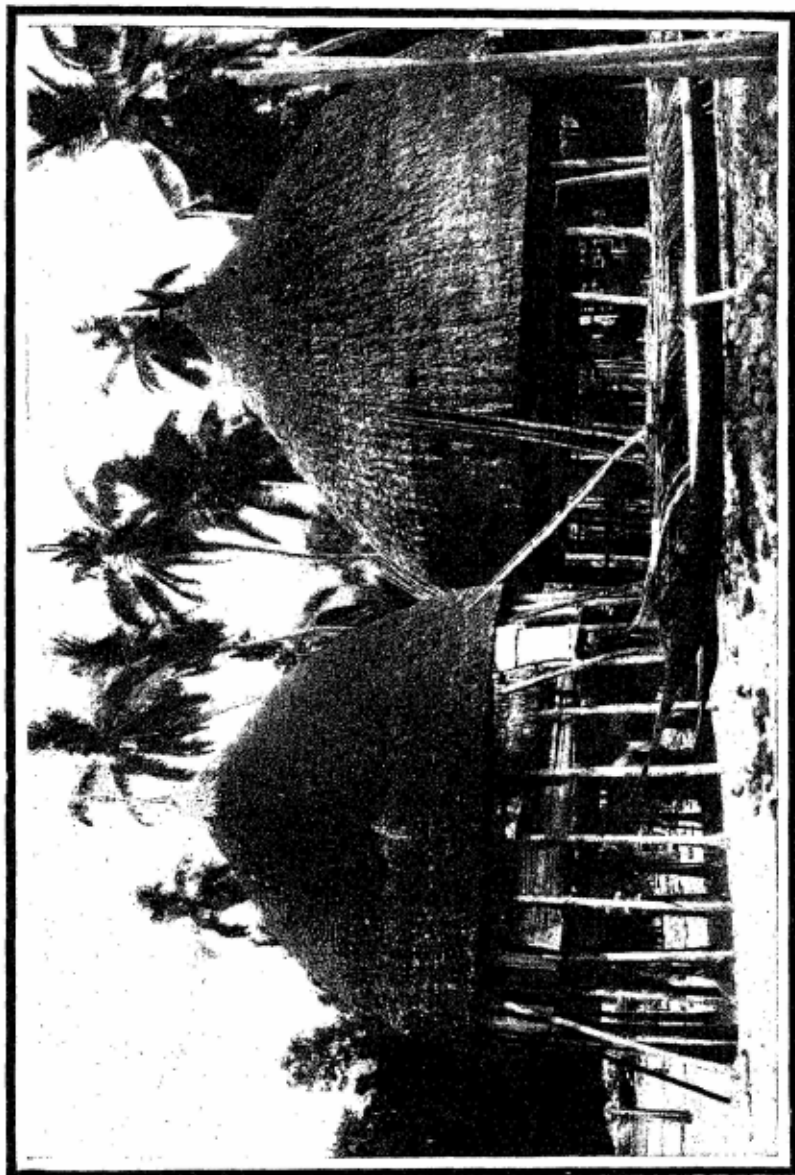
This visit of the Magistrate from Port Blair was also noteworthy as the occasion of the trial of the first Nicobarese person known (to the natives as well as to the Government) to have stolen anything from a Nicobarese house. There had always been some rare cases of pigs being stolen; and more recently nuts (*i.e.* coco-nuts) were occasionally stolen and taken to some trader's shop to be exchanged for tobacco or some other coveted possession; whilst stealing from a foreigner would not be regarded as a heinous offence, unless one were found out—but for a Nicobarese man to steal from a Nicobarese house had hitherto been a thing unheard of. Of course where there is no



money, and where one's needs are so few, and where one's most expensive purchases are all made for display; when, also, almost anyone may come into one's house at any hour and sleep and stay there in the one room in which even to-day there are rarely seen any boxes with locks—one is not much tempted to steal anything but food; and if one should steal, one would have great difficulty in concealing the theft, and very little pleasure in the thought of the possession.

After a preliminary inquiry the Magistrate gave orders for all the witnesses to appear three or four days later, when he would try the case on his way back from Nancowry. The case proved very simple; for the prisoner gave a straightforward account of what he had done. His wife also corroborated his statements, telling what had been done with the things (spoons and forks and cotton cloth, they were, as far as I remember). So he was carried off to Port Blair under an "indefinite sentence." But the Nicobarese convicts are not put along with the Indian and Burmese convicts; indeed they are hardly treated as convicts at all, their environment being so different from that of more advanced peoples. When the Government thinks it right, and safe for the convicted men, these Nicobarese prisoners will be brought back again to their island home.

On the same occasion there was some very hard swearing in a case of the cross-summonses for assault on the part of two Mohammedan traders. There were a number of witnesses on each side, all Indian, all swearing in accordance with what they remembered of the instructions they had received; and the



NATIVE HOUSES ON NANCOWRY HARBOUR.

The villages of Car Nicobar are always just away from the shore ; though the cemetery and public buildings are even there right on the beach in *el-pangam*. The houses, too, are at a convenient distance from each other,



case seemed somewhat hopeless, though it was clear that one trader had been rather badly mauled. This man, however, also at length produced as witness a Nicobarese servant of his, whom he had put into Mohammedan dress, and no doubt tutored carefully as to what he had to say about the origin of the fight. But the Nicobarese at once stated that he did not see the beginning, as it was only the noise of the scuffling in the middle of the street that attracted his attention and made him look round; and "at first it was fighting, and then it was beating." As in England in the old Saxon days the word of an alderman (earl) would outweigh that of a whole parish, so a few years ago the word of a Nicobarese servant in the court of the British Magistrate of these islands would outweigh that of a dozen Indian or Burmese traders. The man who had given his rival a beating was fined (the fine was readily paid), and half the amount was given to the beaten man as compensation.

A dozen years ago the whole of the resident Government staff of the island consisted of an Agent on 60 rupees (=£4) and a peon or orderly on 8 rupees (=10s. 8d.) *per mensem*. Since then the expenses have increased considerably; and three or four Indian police are stationed there in the place of the old peon; but they are there quite as much perhaps to uphold the dignity of the Agency as for any actual use.

Some forty or fifty vessels, *baglas* or schooners, each with a crew of from ten to forty persons, would come for nuts in the course of a twelvemonth, and the Agent must prevent the smuggling of liquors, opium, etc. He also gives clearance certificates to

the ships, and has now to collect a royalty on the nuts, *kopra* and *kali* which are exported.

It is the duty of the Nicobarese to maintain a bridle-path from village to village round the island; and sometimes there is a little *corvée* work at the Agency, when, however, "presents" of food and tobacco would ordinarily be given to the workers. I think that one may safely say that in no part of the world where there is any settled government at all is the direct or indirect taxation so light upon the people as it is upon the people of Car Nicobar; though (as I have seen) among the Chins and other *tounga-ya* (or hill) cultivators of Burma the direct taxation, including all that may be called rent as well as rates and taxes, often amounts to no more than 5 rupees (=6s. 8d.) per annum for a family.

As we have said, all the villages of Car Nicobar are near the coast, and have their *el-panam* (i.e. cemetery, dead-houses, traders' quarters and village hall) actually on the beach. Nine of the thirteen villages are on the east and north-east coast, which of course suffers less from the south-west monsoon, and is also opposite to the Burmese and Malay shores from which the original inhabitants must have come, and where the languages of the aborigines have some affinity with that of the Nicobarese.

According to tradition, when the first people came to Car Nicobar they settled at Lapati, which village has still a kind of precedence over the rest; thus, for example, when the dates of the half-yearly "devil-drives" have to be fixed for the various villages, it is for Lapati to fix its own day, and for

the other villages to make their own arrangements (so as not to clash) after they have learnt what their friends and neighbours have decided. Tradition also reports that the whole island was, at the time of the coming of its first settlers, covered with the thatching grass, but that they planted coco-nuts. It is indeed remarkable that while from time immemorial the coco-palm has been most abundant in the Nicobar Islands, it was very scarce in the Andaman Islands until the British occupation; since which time very great numbers have been planted with success.

Tradition further states that after a number of years, now untold ages ago, the ancestor of Offandi, the late headman of Mus, started the new village of Mus, with the benediction of the people at Lapati; and the whole district was his. Until this day the whole township of Mus, which extends along the Sawi Bay for four or five miles, and also stretches on toward the middle of the island, is supposed to belong to only three landowners, of whom Offandi's representative is one. But, though there is no such thing as rate or tax for the Nicobarese, the landowner is sometimes a poor man, for neither is there any such thing as rent. That a man is rich generally means that he or his father has been industrious in planting nuts, and that the palms are now bearing fruit; that he is poor means that he or his father has been too indifferent to lay down nuts, or too lazy to develop his plantations. If a villager wishes to plant nuts and to cultivate a garden—the two things go together—he will approach the landowner of that part of the township. Leave will at once be

granted unless the landowner or some other friend is thinking of planting in the same spot; in which case some other site must be chosen. The trees belong to the man who planted them, or to his representative; the land belongs still to the original landowner. No rent, as we have said, is paid; indeed the very idea of rent for land or house, as of rates or taxes, seems almost incomprehensible to the Nicobarese mind. The cultivator does, however, owe a certain deference to the landowner; and when the latter has a boat-race on, and is killing a pig for the occasion, the tenants (if we may so call them) have to provide the vegetables and other food that is required. Of course they all share in the race and in the feast; and the whole affair is merely an application of mutual co-operation. The tenants are also required to go to the help of the landowner when he has any special work on, like the making of a new garden or the getting up of the year's supply of yams; but on such occasions also they are feasted, and wages for labour (excepting of course from foreigners, when it is still called a "present") has never been the rule in the island.

Despite the slight hold of the idea of personal proprietorship in the land, the territory of each "village" is most clearly demarcated in the minds of the people; and one or two generations ago there was a violent contention between Mus village and Kinmai village as to the ownership of a not very considerable piece of ground. The peaceable and placable character of the people had brought about the unfortunate consequence that there was no court or body which

by Nicobarese custom could decide any inter-village dispute; so this dispute was settled by a fight, in which the Kinmai folks were defeated, with the loss of several lives.

One of the folk-tales of the Nicobarese tells of a "bad" savage people who first lived on the east coast, and thence were driven to the north-west of the island. They had finally to be exterminated. Perhaps these may have been a race of earlier and more backward inhabitants of the island; Sir R. C. Temple, however, thinks the story may be only a recollection of a village riot (see *Folk-Tale*, No. VII., p. 243).

Every village has its hinterland with its hamlet; and these hamlets of the interior, belonging to all the villages, are comparatively close to one another. So in olden times, whenever pirates or other violent men came to the island, information could be carried to everyone in an almost incredibly short time. At this hamlet the leading men of the village have considerable coco-nut plantations and gardens, with pig farms. But a great part of the interior of the island, which is flat and swampy, and therefore pestilentially malarious, is *panam siō* ("the land of devils" and of departed souls), into which no Nicobarese who has not been initiated into the witch-doctorate would ever dare to venture. One of their folk-tales tells of the dire metamorphosis that befell some unfortunate shipwrecked mariners who accidentally wandered into these parts (see *Folk-Tale*, No. VI., p. 243).

The Car Nicobarese have no proper name of their own for their own island, but will speak of it as *panam*, or *kūñ panam* ("the place," or "the little place, or



land”), though they are aware that the Nicobarese of the other islands give Car Nicobar the name of Pū. Like greater nations, the Car Nicobarese speak of themselves as “the people,” “men” (*ta-rik*), whilst other nations are foreigners. Foreigners are of two classes—the Nicobarese of the other islands (*ta-ōō*), and clothes-wearing foreigners (*ta-ōiny*). These names remind one of a story told by Dr Marks of an incident which happened when he was in Mandalay in the olden days. Seeing someone in his compound whom he did not recognize, he asked one of his boys, “Who is that man?” and received the answer: “He is not a man; he is a *ku-lā*”—i.e. some foreigner from the West.

In many parts of the island there is a very rich but light soil of no great depth, formed largely of decayed vegetable matter mixed with the soft, friable coral rock which lies beneath. The parts near the shore are especially suited for the growth of the coco-palm; farther away from the shore, or on the slightly higher ground, the palms do not grow nearly so large, their life is not so long and they do not bear nearly so prolifically.

There is no valuable timber in Car Nicobar, so (as we have seen) they have to purchase their larger canoes from Nancowry; but there are some very large trees, as the *casuarina* pine, the banyan, and the *kinyav*, whose seeds when grated are mixed with ashes and used to poison the fish in pools. There is also a very lofty palm, the expansive spathe of which is used by the Nicobarese for mats or bedding, for umbrellas, and for making light boxes or baskets. The wild *pandanus* or *mellori* grows so densely in some places as to make

progress impossible to the traveller until an axe has been freely used. From the suckers of it, when split into thin sections, can be made matting for walls, very similar in appearance to the coarsest of bamboo matting. The bamboo is not indigenous to Car Nicobar, but has been introduced to a slight degree. To a large extent a considerable number of fruit-trees have been introduced—limes and sweet limes, shaddocks, jack-fruit and custard-apples; and more important than these are bananas and pine-apples. All these yield heavy crops of a good quality, with a minimum of labour. Attempts have been made by the traders to grow tobacco and the mango, but without any success. The areca-palm, which provides the betel nut, grows prolifically, as does also the plant which yields the betel leaf, which is required (as well as the nut) in chewing betel. The spathe or sheath of the flower of the areca-palm is still much used as plate or dish. The small thorny palm is not uncommon; portions of the thick fibrous part of the leaf of this will, with a very slight amount of trimming, form an excellent instrument for grating the ripe coco-nut and other articles of food, etc. One small tree has strange round seeds with two wing-like excrescences, and when the tree is shaken by the wind or by the hand the seeds come fluttering down, and look for all the world like a lot of bumble-bees disturbed from their nest. There are stinging flies, but no bees, in Car Nicobar; but wild bees are found in Nancowry.

The Nicobarese keep a great number of domestic pigs, which they feed on coco-nut, as they also do their fowls. There are also a great number of dogs, of

varying breeds; the original stock would seem to have been allied to the pariah dog of Burma. Some rather big dogs are specially trained for hunting the wild pig, etc.; these are ordinarily kept tied up, to render them more fierce. Folk-tales tell of the vast number of dangerous wild pigs in the island in olden times (see *Folk-Tale*, No. XVI. p. 259); but to-day a day's hunt on the part of a company of young men may result in none having been even seen; and as far as the more inhabited parts of the island are concerned, and also the paths connecting the more outlying villages of the north and west and south with those of the east coast, any danger from the wild pigs may be disregarded; though sometimes the domestic pig may prove a dangerous customer, either to the man who is bent on teasing it or to the harmless passer-by.

There are pigeons in Car Nicobar; also the swiftlet, that produces the edible bird's-nest of commerce, was at one time fairly common, but has seemed to lessen in numbers rapidly from natural causes. The lofty seawashed cave in which they used to breed largely is now more or less deserted. It was too difficult to be tackled by the Nicobarese, excepting for some very tangible reason; and the quality of the soup that could be made from the nest was only such as might have been made with the use of second-rate gelatine. The fish-eagle is not uncommon; but the crow, which is found almost everywhere, is not indigenous to Car Nicobar.

Crickets are fairly numerous—both the black one, which is so destructive to the yield of the coco-palm by its attack on the green shoots, which then grow as

if cut in patterns with shears, and the green cricket, the cicada, which would almost seem to strive to burst its little breast by the vibrations of the armour of its thorax, and which I have seen struggling desperately to free its feet from the gossamer threads which encompassed them, and on failing to get free rolling over dead as if its little heart had broken.

After I had been in the island about three months I began in my walks to see here and there a few small land-crabs—their shells would be about two and a half inches across. After a few more days, early one morning there was a sudden cry that the crabs had come out of their holes. They were on all sides, in their thousands; and for the next few days men and women, boys and girls, and pigs, were hunting crabs and eating them to repletion. Then in a few days more none was to be found. I am told that in some parts of the island there is a proprietorship in crab-holes, but there did not seem to be any in our neighbourhood—perhaps for the reason that the places where the crabs were especially plentiful gave promise of more labour, before the crabs could be unearthed, than was considered desirable by the Nicobarese. Even quite small children had skill in catching crabs in such a way that they could not get clawed; and indeed, if the children were unlucky or careless, the clawing or bite was not serious.

There are in the island small pythons, but they are not often dangerous, except to fowls; there are also various kinds of small land-snakes, whose bite is not very severe. I have also seen on the foreshore rather large sea-snakes, which had been cast up by the waves.

Crabs, snails and octopuses may be caught among the rocks where there is still some water when the tide is out.

Turtles are not plentiful, as they require a good depth of sand wherein to lay their hundred eggs with leathery shell; but they are sometimes found—including the hawk-bill turtle, which yields the “tortoise-shell” of commerce—especially along the southern coast.

The ocean abounds in large and edible fish, but, as the unquiet sea has never any rest around the shores of Car Nicobar, there is no good spawning ground, and so only deep-sea fishing is much practised.

The people of Car Nicobar are certainly both more astute and more advanced, and possibly less idle, than the people of the other islands, not excepting Chowra, which by reason of its reputation for magic has some ascendancy over them, and pecuniary profit too (see *Folk-Tale*, No. XII., p. 253). They are also more democratic in their ideas. “We have no master (or boss) here; all alike,” they will say. The headmen have much influence rather than much power; they must carry the *kam-ho-ka* (“Assembly of Elders”) with them. If the Government were ever to appoint as headman one who was not himself personally acceptable to the people, I do not suppose that the mere appointment would give him much influence in his village, though the appointment would greatly supplement the influence of a man who was himself personally acceptable to them. Though Car Nicobar is more penetrated by civilization than any of the other islands, this has been at the least cost to native life. Partly on account of there being no good

harbour, and partly on account of the greater intelligence of the people, but not least on account of the watchfulness of a paternal Government, Car Nicobar has suffered much less from foreigners than any other of the Nicobar Islands.

175.3

## CHAPTER III

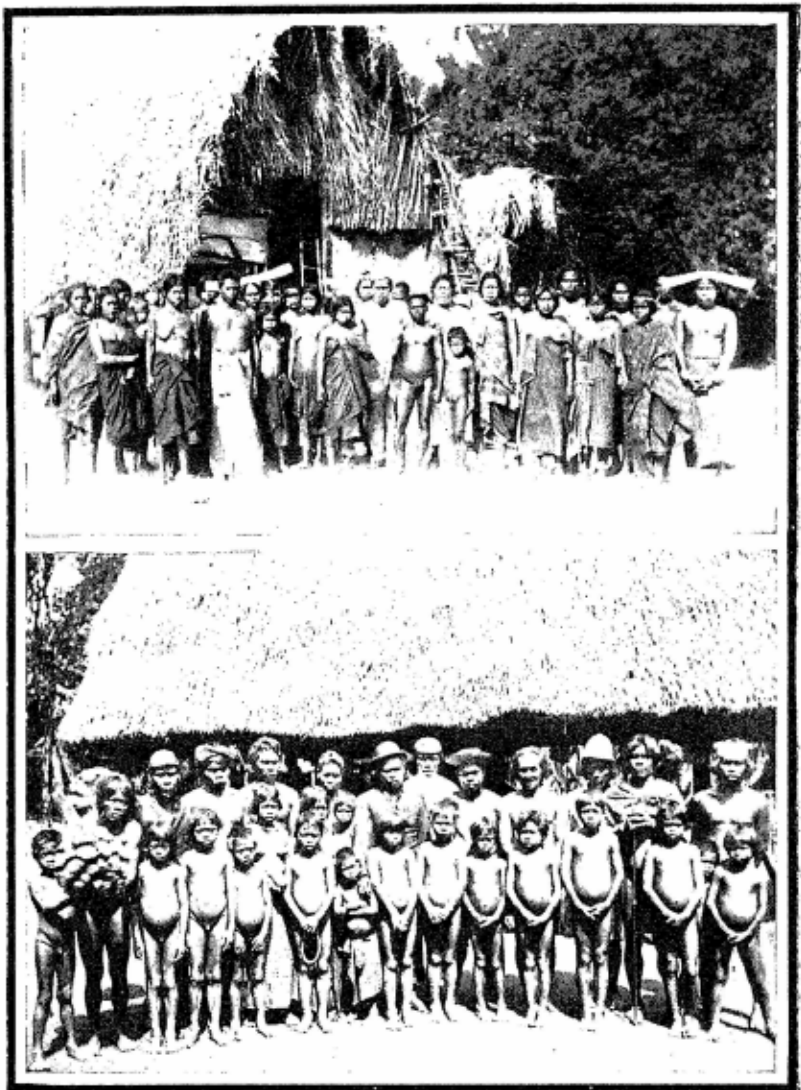
### THE PEOPLE & THEIR HOMES

THE Nicobarese are a Mongolian people, whose language has agglutinative affinities with the tongues of the Talaings of Burma and the Cambodians among civilized peoples, and of a number of the aboriginal tribes found in Malaya and Sumatra. In appearance they are rather like "undistinguished" Burmans, somewhat darker and coarser in feature, and also somewhat broader in build and fuller in muscle. Indeed in one respect they have reached the ideal—they all do enough work to keep themselves in good health; and none of them does so much as in any way to injure his health.

I had thought that the Burmese must be classed amongst the most indolent of peoples; but after twenty years in Burma I came to the conclusion that I had reached the limit with my Nicobarese servant man. Later on I came to regard this same man as one of the most industrious of the Nicobarese. As my friend the Deputy Superintendent, Mr Lewis, said, the Nicobarese have never had to contend for their rights with a hostile people, and so they have never developed courage; they have never had to struggle for their very existence with adverse circumstances, such as a barren soil or a too densely peopled land, and so they have not developed a spirit of industry and of persistent endeavour; yet what the Nicobarese do they







A GROUP OF NICOBARESE

standing in front of a small hut, with an Andamanese visitor in the middle of the front row ;  
taken at Arong on the west coast of Car Nicobar.

A GROUP OF NICOBARESE MEN AND CHILDREN,

in all sorts of dress and undress, taken under a house in Mus village. The man on the left is  
holding two *pandanus*.

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do fairly well; and they are much more careful to finish off neatly, and to keep clean, their boats and their houses than are the Burmese or the jungly Indians. Also the two old boys of our school who served during the war in the Mechanical Transport Department in Mesopotamia did not show any lack of courage in the driving of their motor-lorries.

The outstanding virtues of the Nicobarese are their peaceful, quiet spirit and their ordinarily truthful and honest conduct; but foreign influence has not had a very good effect on them. A young adult, who had indeed been a number of years away from his native land, could truthfully tell me that he did not remember ever to have seen two Nicobarese fighting. Again, no shipwrecked mariner need fear violence at their hands, unless indeed he has provoked them to violence by deeds of cruelty, and so caused them to believe that he is possessed of a devil; or, possibly, unless by misadventure he had travelled into "the forbidden land," the land of spirits. In such case he might think himself very fortunate indeed if he should not be cruelly put to death as a "bad" man. It has been supposed that on more than one occasion when, before the British annexation, the people turned pirates and plundered the ships which had come peaceably to the islands, and murdered the crews, they were led by renegade British sailors; but the "foreigners" who led the Nicobarese were more probably Chinese or Malay.

Of course no one would suppose their virtues to be the developed characteristics of a mind consciously working to this end; they are rather the marks of

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their somewhat bovine temperament. Through lack of thought they can be very cruel; and as for the sufferings of the smaller creatures of the field, they probably never give any consideration at all to them. With bird-lime they will catch beautiful small birds for food, and then string them on a stick by driving this through the lower jaw and out at the mouth. The poor little things will for a long time continue to flutter, but it never occurs to the Nicobarese to put them out of their misery.

Though they are so lazy they have not any hatred of work as work, as some of the degenerate sons of other lands have. They merely find continuous work uncongenial and trying, and they do not wish to be incommoded in any way. They will indeed toil hard for a spell at rowing, but they would not keep it up very long. Even if their lives depended on it I do not suppose that they could hold on as more disciplined peoples could; their energies would flag, and they would die—needlessly, as we should say. They will also work hard carrying heavy loads of nuts, singing and joking all the while, so long as they are in a merry company and the task is not carried on indefinitely.

It is utterly beyond the imagination of a Nicobarese man to face singly by himself a piece of work which might take him a solid fortnight to finish, if he were to work steadily eight hours a day. He must have friends working along with him; and indeed the Nicobarese words *hol o'* equally mean "his friend" and "with him," and none may say which was the original meaning. An industrious Nicobarese man or woman

is one who would ordinarily put in three or four half-hours of work in the course of a normal day, and who would not object to strenuous work very occasionally, if he had companions and were interested in the work. Under such conditions he might be willing to go on working continuously for three or four hours. Of course work like the cutting down of nuts, where a slight relaxation of the muscles might result in immediate death, ought not to be long continued at a time; whilst the climate is not such as to encourage industry in anyone, and is far more relaxing than that of Port Blair. Visitors to Car Nicobar have remarked that on reaching the island even dogs succumb to the *genius loci*, and cannot be roused even to chase pigs.

The Nicobarese are a simple, easy-going, placable people of weak will-power, but are not in intellect below the level of many other Mongolian peoples, though they are in such a very backward state of civilization. They have no agriculture, or manufactures, or mining, and they do not catch a quarter of the amount of fish they would like to consume.

In Great Nicobar, where the population is very scanty, and the supply of nuts is not sufficient to bring many trading vessels, the people often wear bast-cloth, made of the inner bark of exogenous trees, and a short loin-cloth of this, or of the cloth-like fibre produced by the coco-palm, was largely worn by women in all the islands before the days when imported foreign cloth was available. In certain malarious parts of the hinterland, in Car Nicobar, where "the devils" are very dangerous, to this day the women wear only a short skirt of grass or split coco-palm leaf: the devils would

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seize them, they say, and they would die, if they were to wear foreign cloth in those parts. But when they come into town—that is, into any of the shore villages—they discard this ancient dress. I have seen it worn only twice, and even then by women who had on under this grass skirt the usual foreign cloth skirt.

The ordinary dress of the Nicobarese man consists of a small piece of cotton cloth, sometimes blue or white, but generally turkey-red in colour. It is of such diminutive proportions that only by a euphemism can it be termed a “loin-cloth.” It has long strings which, after being tied round the body, hang down behind as tails, and this custom is no doubt the origin of the long-maintained fable that the Nicobarese were not only a naked people but also had tails. To complete the dress of a lad or man, at least “for state occasions,” there is needed a little “turban,” if it can be so called, formed from the spathe of the areca-palm, torn into bands of about two inches in width, which go round the head and project some nine inches upwards and outwards. It is very strange (as a visitor remarked to me) that as instinct has taught them to wear some clothing it should be satisfied with their wearing of this minimum. The Nicobarese folk-tale of the Deluge tells us that it is in order to express their descent from a bitch that was taken to wife by the solitary man who remained after the Flood that they copy the figure of the dog by this wearing of a tail, and also make the ends of their turban to stand up like a dog’s ears (see *Folk-Tale*, No. I., p. 239).

In addition to the *kisāt*, as this scanty Nicobarese loin-cloth is called, men and boys will wear any kind

of clothing which comes their way, English or Burmese by way of preference. At the mission school the boys wear short loose pyjamas of thin dark cotton material, and as this is found both becoming and convenient it is often copied by others. Sometimes the leading men will be the proud possessors of a suit of khaki, or even of woollen cloth, which they find most uncomfortably warm and close, and after showing themselves in their fine clothes they will hasten to divest themselves of them. Like other backward nations, they have a penchant for tall hats, black or white, and for any gaudy material. I have seen my old friend, the headman of Mus, dressed in a coat of flimsy red cotton with large blue stars sewn on to it.<sup>1</sup>

The women have largely taken to the Burmese dress, though some wear the South Indian *sari*; but it must not be supposed that they always put on their clothes in the orthodox fashion, *à la mode citoyenne*. They will occasionally wear a double set of clothing, sometimes in their dances, and also at other times, when extra clothing is not needed for the sake of warmth. Mothers with babies often wear only an unsewn loin-cloth some eighteen inches wide; indeed, excepting in the case of coats, trousers and the *kisāt*, the clothing of the Nicobarese is not sewn. The women, and sometimes the youths also, will wear necklaces and armlets of beads or two-anna bits, if they can get them; and women and children will also wear bangles and anklets of silver or brass or glass. Gold ornaments are practically not worn in Car Nicobar, though in Nancowry they are not infrequently seen.

<sup>1</sup> See note on page 71.

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Men, women and children are all fond of smoking tobacco, cheroots, pipes, etc., and are especially partial to Chinese tobacco, which they purchase from the traders. This tobacco is now generally made in Rangoon. They will roll it in some leaf or other into small cigarettes, which they smoke on almost any occasion, except certain solemn functions when it is taboo.

The houses of the people are very much like enormous old-fashioned round bee-hives. They are raised from six to eight feet above the ground, on great posts. The doorway is in the floor, and entrance is by means of a light ladder which can be easily drawn up whenever privacy is desired. In the better houses a trap-door can be put down, and sometimes the place can be fastened up with a padlock, but this is not ordinarily the case.

The building of a house entails a lot of labour, and often drags on a long, long while. The house is built on the ground, and afterwards carried and placed on the posts. The framework of the house is very strongly made of big pieces of wood, and nails are not largely used. After the bottom part has been fitted together, and secured with great bars and cross-bars, a number of straight and pliable young trees are selected and cut down, and brought and fastened into the framework. These are then pulled over, and all made to meet at a point, whilst some distance below this apex, fastened to them, there is another framework of bars and cross-bars. This construction serves the double purpose of preventing the supports of the roof from falling inwards, and of providing an excellent store-loft where may be safely deposited boxes containing their treasures, as well as the year's stores of yams and

lard. The loft is reached by a movable light ladder, resting on the floor of the house: often the ladder by which the house is reached is used for ascending to the store-loft. There is a great deal of cane and creeper, of bark and other kinds of cord used in securing everything in its place. The roof is made of the same kind of thatching grass as is used in Burma, only the Nicobarese make a very substantial thick thatch, that in general appearance is much like the old thatched roofs of the cottages of Devon. This thatch will stand the tropical sun and tropical rain for five seasons without much or any leakage. The floor is made of split bamboos, which are all carefully smoothed, and laid down with interstices of from a quarter to a half inch in width between each other. They are tied with cane or bark cords at comparatively short distances. There is a very great contrast between this sure and yet slightly yielding floor of a Nicobarese house and the insecure and carelessly made bamboo floor of the average up-country Burmese house.

In a Nicobarese house there is only the one room, often really large and always fairly lofty. The new house built by Kingfisher at Perka in 1912 was about forty feet across. The great inconvenience of the house is that all the light and ventilation has to come through the door and the interstices between the bamboos—all in the floor. Much of the cooking is generally done outside, sometimes in a special cook-house or kitchen; but there is always a fire-place also on the floor in the house, and the smoke has to get out as best it may. Naturally everything gets blackened with soot. Generally over the fire-place there is, hanging



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from above and supported from the sides or floor, a shelf or range for food and for the cooking pots which are not actually being used.

It should also be mentioned that, not much below the floor of the house, every post has a board round it which is made to rest horizontally upon it before the house is put in its place. On first noticing this one naturally concludes that it is connected with some superstitious idea. One finds, however, that its use is truly practical: it is the effective barrier that prevents the innumerable rats which work destruction among the nuts from getting into the house and playing havoc there in the thatch.

Before a new house will be occupied there will be the important function of banishing the evil spirits; after which there will be dancing and song and a feast.

Besides these round houses they also build inferior rectangular huts, some of which are large and intended for human habitation. These have an upright doorway at one end, and often a window for ventilation at the other. Such are, however, not dignified with the name of *pañi* (house), but are called *talika* (hut). Often there is in addition, away from the main buildings, a quite small rectangular cooking-house; often also a hen-roost, with accommodation for pigs below.

The furniture of the houses is very scanty. There will be some rolls of *chamam* (the spathe or sheath of the flower of the giant palm), which are used as bedding; and there may be to lie upon also Indian grass mats or Burmese cane or bamboo mats, or even English hearth-rugs. The well-laid floor is not perfectly rigid, but gives a little; and indeed nothing but a pillow

is needed by the sleeper, and one's arm put under one's head will serve indifferently well as a pillow. The cooking pots, whether obtained from Chowra or not, and the plates, etc., will be near the fire-place, as will also be the food which has been left for consumption by the late-comers. Though enamelled soup-plates are perhaps now most commonly used to contain the rice, etc., of each person, a piece of the spathe of the areca-palm is still frequently used as a plate or dish. Such reserves of food as the year's stock of yams will be high up in the loft in the middle of the room. There also will probably be up there one or two Burmese teak-wood boxes, containing the treasures of cloth and the large spoons and forks which are used for the inside decoration of the house at the great Ossuary Feast. There will generally be lying about a Burmese lacquered betel-box, with lime and the other accessories required in chewing betel; whilst large boar tusks will be found arranged on the walls—trophies not of the chase but of the feast. At the feast of *Ka-na-an Ha-un* (the Ossuary Feast), if a rich man who is taking part in the feast does not happen to possess an extremely large pig (and some of them are as large as English prize pigs), he will often buy one at a somewhat exorbitant price from someone who is not concerned in the coming feast. A large toy canoe for racing across narrow bays, etc., is also a frequent possession—such may be up to twenty feet in length. A few *dahs* (choppers), axes and other implements, and a few changes of clothing hanging on the walls, together with people and cobwebs, form the remaining contents of their houses.

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Underneath their houses are generally one or two large and very roughly made bedsteads or settles, the use of which has been manifestly introduced from Burma. Here, as well as upstairs, the people can sit or lie, talk or sleep, at any time of the day or night.

The Nicobarese do not object to strangers coming into their houses, except on the rare occasions when the ladder has been removed from the entrance; and considerable numbers of both sexes, young and old, of different families, may be ordinarily sleeping in the one room of the larger houses. Normally all the houses in one group (generally from two to eight in number) belong to one man in his individual or his representative capacity, and all his relatives and dependents and occasional labourers and others who attach themselves to these, as also all their "friends" from other villages, will be housed by him, and normally fed by him as a matter of course. Though those who are very much irregulars may be expected to provide their own food, no one ever dreams of the possibility of such a thing as rent. Often the leading man and his own family will live more or less apart from the others in one of the smaller houses of the group, but I have the idea that this is a modern innovation.

Each little hamlet, as the *tu-hēt* or group of houses may be called, is kept beautifully clean; sand from the beach has been carried up and strewn fairly thickly all over the ground; but as they are surrounded by dense, lofty coco-palm groves they do not get much fresh breeze. On this account some few

of the richer people have also private houses on the beach in *el-panam*, whilst occasionally a hut will be erected anywhere on the beach, in his plantation, for one who is sick.

On account of the moist heat, labour and even walking is often found trying; so frequently the Nicobarese will travel from village to village by night rather than by day; often, too, they will carry their nuts to the shops at night. As they are always in fear of spirits, even when there is a full moon they would not dare to go alone or without torches. But in dry weather the providing of torches is a very simple matter; all they need to do is, as they go along, to pick up a moderate-sized leaf of the coco-palm (for I have seen these as much as thirty-six feet in length), then with a match (for matches can be purchased cheaply at the shops) light the end of the leaf, and there is a bright blaze at once. This will last for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, when one's "friend" (more truly, "comrade") will light at the dying torch the new one he has ready. When one goes out fishing all night by torch-light, in order to make the torches last out longer the branching leaves are tied loosely round the central stem of the leaf by strips ripped from the leaves.

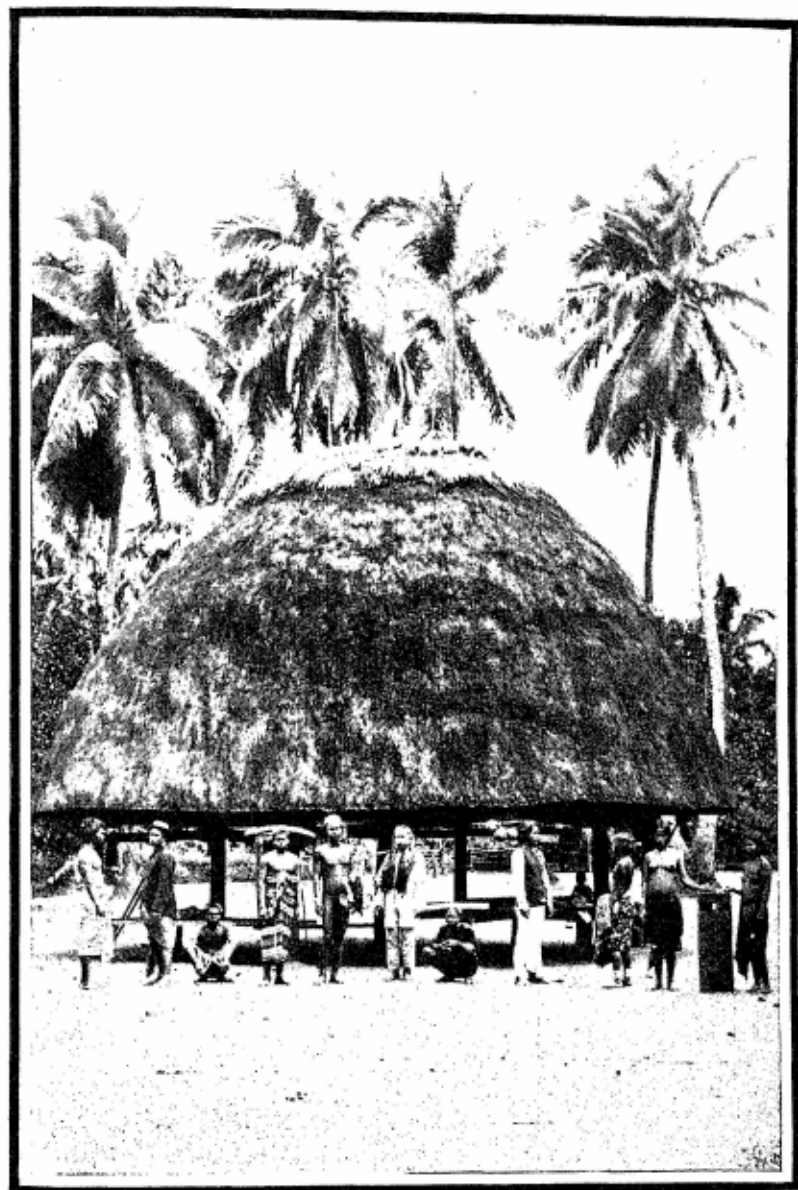
A *tu-hēt* (or group of houses) is often lit up at night by burning the half-shells of the ripe coco-nut. These are placed in a large crescent, each shell partly over the next; the last one is then lighted, and they will continue to burn on steadily for two or three hours without any further attention, and will give a good light. The houses are lighted inside by lamps burning

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coco-nut oil, or more frequently in these days kerosene oil, which is purchased with nuts from the traders. It is astonishing on first coming to the island to find that this primitive people keeps such late hours; often the shops are not closed much before midnight.

Formerly the people almost literally lived on the coco-nut; and four or five nuts a day would not even now be an extravagant estimate of the number of nuts drunk or eaten by each Nicobarese adult. Indeed four ripe nuts a day is the minimum that is supplied to each pig, in addition to all the food it finds by its own foraging, including crabs and other shell-fish and snails on the beach, as well as roots and nuts.

One readily feels thirst in the Nicobar Islands, and the Nicobarese must assuage their thirst by drinking the liquid of the green nut, which is at once both food and drink. According to the *Census Report* of 1901 water is drunk only as a medicine in Car Nicobar. It is a very small matter to climb a palm and cut down the required nuts, for the Nicobarese rarely travels without his light chopper (or *dah*—a Burmese word, as the implement itself is obtained from Burma). When he wishes to rest a while on a journey, if there is a house near the Nicobarese will go, not indeed to ask for permission to cut the nuts—that is taken for granted—but to inquire which tree he should cut the nuts from, as some of the trees may be taboo. Even as the Jewish law ran, “When thou comest into thy neighbour’s vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel” (Deut. xxiii. 24), so the Nicobarese traveller may eat and drink as much as he desires,



A HOUSE OF THE USUAL TYPE.

Two women are standing by a memorial post which they will decorate for erection in the grave-yard. Underneath the houses are the usual settees on which the Nicobarese will sit or sleep by day or by night.



but not take anything more. However, when one is travelling from Kakana to Malacca through a part where for some miles there are no nuts, this rule, not to carry anything away, is not considered to be literally strictly binding, and most Nicobarese before leaving the last grove will not only drink one nut—they will also take another to drink on the way.

Among the Car Nicobarese there are seven different names for coco-nuts, according to their stage of development, and it is very rarely that a Nicobarese is deceived as to the condition of a nut, though one kind of nut remains green even when ripe. According to his appetite he will choose a nut which has much "flesh" in it, or little, or none. Then, holding the nut in his left hand, he will with one stroke of his *dah* cut off a portion of the shell and husk, and proceed to drink the nut, which he will do without spilling any. If he is hungry also he will then, again with one stroke, split the nut in two, and by chipping off a small piece of the outer husk he is immediately provided with a first-rate spoon, with handle, for scooping out the contents of the shell. This indeed suits his purpose far better than an English spoon would do, for whilst it misses none of the "flesh," which is ever the sweeter the nearer to the shell, it never cuts off any part of the bitter-tasted shell itself (which is still rather soft), as an English spoon would occasionally do. The ripe nut may be partaken of only in moderation, as an Englishman's experience at home may teach him; but the fresh liquid and the flesh of the half-ripe nut are not only most sustaining foods—they have also a beneficial tonic and medicinal effect on the system.



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The next most important articles of food to the Nicobarese are the yam and the *pandanus*, though in these days with many people rice has more or less taken their place as an article of daily food. The rice is purchased with nuts from traders' shops. There are many kinds of yams (or sweet potatoes) grown in their gardens, which are mainly right away in the jungle. The yams are cooked, and eaten with pork, or fish, or anything else that may fall their way; but in the ordinary course they are eaten with lard, which they have kept in reserve in coco-nut bottles from the last *Ka-na-an Ha-un* festival, when the very fattest of the pigs were killed just to be rendered into lard.

The cooking of the *pandanus* (*mellori*, or "bread-fruit") is a long business, and will be explained in another chapter. When fully prepared it has much the same qualities of colour, taste and nutriment as pease pudding; it is much relished by some of the people, and sometimes a man will eat as much as a pound of it at a time.

Pork is very much relished, but it is not a regular article of diet, despite the enormous number of pigs kept in the island. At the festivals the people will eat to repletion, and then perhaps have no more pork for weeks or months, except when they go to the feasts at other villages. Some of the people, however, like my old friend Offandi, will occasionally kill one of their porkers in order to have a little change of diet. He would always send me up a portion of the fresh meat, for which I was very thankful.

The Nicobarese are also fond of fish, but find difficulty in getting as much as they would like. The

trading firms supply their own men with an allowance of dried fish, and when the shops have stocked fish for sale they have generally had brisk trade until the supply was finished; but this item of goods leaves much more opportunity for cheating on the part of their employees than the firms generally care to permit. Fowls are kept to a considerable extent, but rather on account of the requirement of sacrificial blood than as providing eggs and meat for the larder. Land and sea crabs, snails, octopuses, birds, and occasionally turtles and turtles' eggs, or an iguana, also afford some little variety of diet. They are not always very particular as to the condition of their food, and I have known a Nicobarese woman die from eating the flesh of an animal (a pig I think it was) found dead in the jungle.

They also grow in their gardens a considerable amount of fruit; besides *pandanus*, they have excellent bananas, pine-apples, shaddocks, sweet limes, papayas, jack-fruit and custard-apples.

The ordinary drink of the people, as we have said, is the fresh sweet liquid of the unripe coco-nut. Most of the elders, men and women alike, are more or less given to drinking "toddy" (*tari*), which is got by placing pots to catch the liquid which oozes out when the protuberances of the coco-palm are cut off. At first it is sweet and non-intoxicating; but it soon ferments naturally. It is collected every evening—the palm will generally continue to yield toddy for a few months. The liquid is sometimes drunk from cups of various kinds, but the regular toper prefers to suck it through a straw or thin bamboo from a coco-nut bottle which he (or she)

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carefully nurses. I never have seen any Nicobarese really drunk, though I have seen seasoned men who had taken enough to loosen freely their tongues, which are generally somewhat tied. If, however, spirituous liquor were attainable I fear the results would be deplorable. The Magistrates and the Government Agents on their very occasional visits to the more remote villages of the other Nicobar Islands have not infrequently reported on finding every man, woman and child in the place very drunk with foreign spirit; and the same thing has been once reported of a Car Nicobar village. The spirit would be, in almost every case, smuggled by a Chinese junk.

Though their habits generally are so primitive, and their roasting of pork often consists in merely singeing the carcass in the fierce blaze of torches of palm leaves, whilst birds are roasted on a skewer in the fire or in the ashes, the Nicobarese have discovered the nutritive qualities of tripe and the way to cook fish by steaming it.

The people are extremely hospitable. When any visitor comes to a house toddy (*tari*) is normally offered to him, and also betel nut and tobacco. There is no place in the island where a Nicobarese man (or anyone else) could purchase or barter food or other refreshments for himself; except that tobacco and sometimes biscuits, and of course uncooked rice, can be bartered for nuts at the traders' shops. Yet the want is not felt, and the idea of cooked food being regularly on sale anywhere in the world is not easy of comprehension to the Nicobarese. Their hospitality is, however, more or less reasoned; they

have a keen sense of *quid pro quo*. Indeed they have two quite different words which are both rendered "present" in English: one is the word *in-lōn-ti*, which means "a free gift," having no reference to favours received in the past or expected in the future; whilst the usual word *ri-neus-hōō* is even used of the goods which a trader will give them (after a good bit of haggling) for their labour, being then neither more nor less than "wages." Every man (or family) has his friend or comrade (*hol*) in every other village of the island, who will give him hospitality on his every visit to the village, and who will especially invite him and his dependents to every feast in his own village in which he himself is taking any part.

With the exception of the purchase of pigs and coco-nut plantations and canoes, the Car Nicobarese have never had any buying or selling, or even regular barter, among themselves. A pig might be valued at three, four or five coco-palms in good condition, or from six hundred to two thousand nuts. For their big racing canoe, purchased from Nancowry through the Chowra middlemen, the people of Mus village gave goods purchased from the traders for thirty-five thousand pairs of coco-nuts. But in ordinary life no one buys or sells or barter anything except at the foreign shops, where goods are purchased for nuts. If a man has been very successful in his fishing, and has caught more fish than he and his people (including all those who live in his *tu-hēt*) can eat—and to do this he would have to be very successful indeed—he would then make presents to his friends. Similarly, if he has much ripe fruit on his hands, or an abundance

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of pork, he gives away some to his friends; but a very well-marked mental note would be made of such "friends" as do not make a return of gifts some time in the future. "I your friend, you my friend," says my old friend Offandi when he brings me a piece of pork, and receives at the same (or some other) time a quantity of Burmese cheroots or Chinese tobacco. "I want to taste your dinner," remarked Old Tom Dixon to me several times over on one of my visits to Sawi, so I had to understand his English and share my dinner with him. But on the next occasion of my visiting Sawi he did not forget to send me a piece of pork which was much more than a repayment for what he had had from me. It is not contrary to the rules of etiquette among the Nicobarese to ask a favour, but it is always rude to refuse a request.

Such a thing, however, as to offer a Nicobarese man some tobacco, or anything else that he may want, for a certain amount of fruit or for a chicken, and still more to haggle with him about the price, would seem to him unnatural and unfriendly, and the proposition could never be entertained for a moment by one of nature's gentlemen—unless, that is, the person with whom he had to deal was merely one of those traders, or at least a foreigner. A foreigner resident in the island, however, could think only how much more comfortably things could be managed if regular barter was in vogue for fruit and vegetables, for pork and chicken and eggs.

## NOTE TO PAGE 57

"Our send-off is characteristic. There is a crowd of boats doing a last bargain and containing all our friends. Offandi still half-seas-over, and vainly endeavouring to put on a white suit just obtained over the dark one he already has on. 'Friend of England' in his black silk hat and almost nothing else, his red toga [*i.e.* blanket which had been wrapped round his body] having fallen off in his endeavours to stand up in a boat no bigger than himself, in order to offer a rupee for more rum. Young Gwyn newly adorned in a tall white hat tied round with a yellow puggaree striped with red, and with a newly acquired suit of white uniform. The coat and shirt he wears; but he has tied the trousers round his neck for convenience, because these unaccustomed garments chafe him. Yet he salutes with all gravity as becoming his dignity as a young chief, Mr Solomon quietly and gravely saluting as he paddles off to the shore. All are very friendly and respectful in their democratic way. Altogether it is an instructive sight (if comic), and ever fresh, this rough homage of a totally ignorant people to the far-stretching arm of the British Empire."—Sir R. C. Temple.

"To me the extraordinary thing is that these men in their comical rig don't look at all self-conscious or even ridiculous. . . . I imagine Solomon was dead before you went there. He was really a very wise old fellow. We left him in Car Nicobar once for some months, and he sent in a report of his doings. One thing I shall never forget. He said he had gone over all the island, and been most hospitably entertained by the chiefs; so before he left he thought he ought to give a feast in return. This he did, and from his stores gave the chiefs many delicacies to which they were not accustomed. He finished his account in these words: 'To conclude I gave each of my guests a glass of rum, having previously doubled the quantity by way of adulteration, but none of my guests detected the illusion, being well tightened with toddy.' . . . I once read a book, the life of Captain Eastwide who traded round the coasts of India about the end of the eighteenth century. He went to the Nicobars for coco-nuts, and remarked that the pigs were 'most sumptuous.' That was in 1794. They were still 'most sumptuous' in 1894, and no doubt are so still."—Letter of the Rev. J. Low.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE TRADERS

THE Burmese call Car Nicobar "Coco-nut Island," and it well deserves the name. On approaching the island from certain quarters it looks like one vast grove of coco-palms, with a few other trees thrown in to make a little variation. It is for the nut and for *kopra*, which is the sun-dried flesh of the ripe nut, that the foreign traders come to the island, and have established shops in every village. Formerly small British sailing vessels used to come to the island for "nuts," and would stay there an indefinite time, to collect the nuts from individual owners with whom they were able by barter to transact business. After his usual custom, the Englishman did not learn the language of the native, but expected the natives among whom he was a "bird of passage" to learn English; and many of the older men, like Jemmy London, Old Tom Dixon and Offandi, all now no more, acquired a sufficient knowledge of English to enable them to carry on business, and to converse tolerably easily on many sublunary matters in the language, and when they went down to Nancowry (or Camorta) the medium of conversation and business with the Nicobarese of those islands was sometimes the English language. It was from their sailor friends that so many of them got their English names. To-day, however, Hindustani is the best-known foreign tongue.

Chinese junks from time immemorial have occasionally come to Nancowry, but they rarely came on to Car Nicobar, which has no tolerably good harbour, and there have been none at all coming for many years. For this one is heartily thankful; for whilst the Chinese, on account of their industry and honesty, may be regarded as the finest race in the East, as traders among a backward people they are generally a curse, for they introduce spirits and opium. As far as one's own experience goes, the Chinese in Burma seem to be able to take either spirits or opium in moderation, without doing so much harm to their character and constitution as many English people do to theirs by their abuse of alcohol. But it is not so with the Burmese; and still less would it be so with the Nicobarese; and so the Government has for many years prohibited the importing of spirits and opium into the Nicobar Islands. In Car Nicobar there is very little smuggling; but there is a considerable amount still in the Central Islands.

The British sailing ship has long been ousted out of the trade with the Nicobars, and its place is now taken by the *baglas* and schooners of Indian and Burmese merchants. According to the *Census Report* of 1901 over 75 per cent. of the foreign traders were from Burma; but for many years past, even when the Agent was a Burman, there has been a great proportionate falling off in the Burmese element, which now forms perhaps not one quarter of the foreigners resident in the island. The rest are mainly from the Maldives and Laccadives, from Ceylon and Madras, though representatives of most of the provinces of India are



to be found there. Were other things equal, the Burmese trader would flourish, for the Nicobarese feels that he and the Burman are akin by temperament, as they are by origin (both being Mongolians); and the Burmese have no caste, and enjoy eating pork nearly as much as do the Nicobarese, whilst their religion (Buddhism) places no bar to intercourse. On the other hand, the temperamental difference between the Indian and the Nicobarese is patent to everyone. Further, the Moslem Indian is surrounded by pigs and pig-eating natives, whom his soul abhors; whilst the difficulties in the way of a Hindu, who when far from home still pays some attention to caste restrictions, are such as almost to prevent him entering the lists as a competitor for the trade. But even more than his Indian brother, who has some fear of killing the goose that lays the golden eggs, the Burman is given to taking advantage of his superior knowledge, or skill or position, to exploit most ruthlessly those whom he gets into his power. This oppression and violence, a number of years ago, before there was any Agent stationed at Car Nicobar, caused the people of Perka to rise up against the traders resident in their village, who were all Burmans, and to kill them all. Even now, when there is a Government Agent in the island, I think the conduct of the Burmese traders is more corrupt than that of the Indians in every respect, whether as to honesty in business transactions, or as to attempting to get forced labour through threats of violence or magic, or in their relations with the Nicobarese women. I do not put all this down to the Indian being naturally a finer character than the Burman,

but to the different systems of recruiting men for the shops and to their ways of management.

There are many competing shops in every small village, and there is an average of one foreign trader to less than thirty inhabitants. Most of the Indian shops belong to large firms which have their headquarters in Colombo, Calcutta and Bombay. These firms have each of them collecting stations (for that is what the shops are) in practically every village in Car Nicobar, and possibly also in Nancowry and in the Cocos Islands. Each firm places all its shops under a responsible head, often a junior member of the firm, who in education and outlook and character is far above the men under him, and has power to transact any business in the name of the firm. These firms also charter their own *baglas*, schooners or other native sailing craft to bring their stores, and to take away their nuts and *kopra*. Each shop is placed in charge of a shopman, who will receive from 10 to 15 rupees, or even more, *per mensem*, with rations of food and clothing and other allowances; the shopman will be assisted by a servant, whose wages are generally from 6 to 10 rupees a month. These men are ordinarily brought over under a contract for two years, and the more reliable men, after a trip home in the firm's boat, are often ready to come back again and again. The Burmese firms are much smaller; they trust to sending their stores and receiving their nuts and *kopra* by the boats of other firms, or by some boat running as a speculation. The same firm, too, does not place all its shops under one responsible head, but each man is master in his own

shop and individually responsible to the firm in Maulmain (Burma), though of course there is a kind of camaraderie between the different shops in the island belonging to the same firm. So though the individual Burmese shopman may not be inferior in character or judgment to the individual Indian one, the general level of their social and business transactions is much lower.

The foreign traders are not allowed to live in the villages alongside the natives, but have their quarters on or very near the beach in *el-panam*, hard by the unclean quarters of the cemetery, and the dead and birth houses. Here also are the very large and "good" (*i.e.* ceremonially clean) houses which the Nicobarese erect as the village hall and as the reception rooms of honoured guests. In these days, too, some of the richer Nicobarese have a "good" house of their own on the beach, in addition to their houses in the village—perhaps four hundred yards away—in the midst of the coco-palm grove, for they find the air on the beach fresher and healthier. Sometimes also the Nicobarese will erect, right on the beach, even where there are no other houses, a hut for one of themselves who may be troubled with consumption or other sickness; whilst the traders are ready to erect huts at any place on the coast to which they can push in a boat, if there is any considerable supply of nuts in that neighbourhood.

The traders' huts are mostly rectangular, with the private quarters of the traders in the back portion, though they generally sleep by day or by night on the raised broad benches provided in the shop for customers

and visitors. The walls are generally of wooden bars, with palm leaf interwoven, though sometimes they are made of imported brick; the roof is always of thatch and the floor of earth.

The goods they have on sale are rice and Chinese tobacco; longcloth, turkey-red and other coloured cloths, Burmese *longyi*s (or loin-cloths) and coats, Indian *saris* (*i.e.* women's dress), khaki clothes, caps and hats; choppers (the Burmese *dah* which is universally used by the natives) and axes; soup-ladles, and table-spoons and forks (generally of nickel—these are used as personal ornaments by the *ma-a-fāi*, the novices for the witch-doctorate, and also for the decoration of the interior of their houses at the Ossuary Feast; or they are to be chopped up as a propitiation to the spirits of the departed); cups and tumblers, enamelled soup-plates; salt and sugar, condensed milk and coarse biscuits; matches and kerosene oil, beads and looking-glasses, needles, fish hooks and lines, lacquered betel-boxes and teak-wood boxes, and occasionally gramophones, or any gaudy and showy ornament.

These goods are exchanged for "nuts," which may be regarded as the currency of the island. Nuts are always counted in pairs, as for the purpose of carrying them a little strip of the husk is always ripped up and two are tied together. Sometimes the purchase of matches, salt, fish-hooks or rice, etc., is on a very small scale—for one or two pairs of nuts only; sometimes the business transaction is for a great quantity of goods, or for a gramophone, and the price may run into several thousands of (pairs of) nuts.

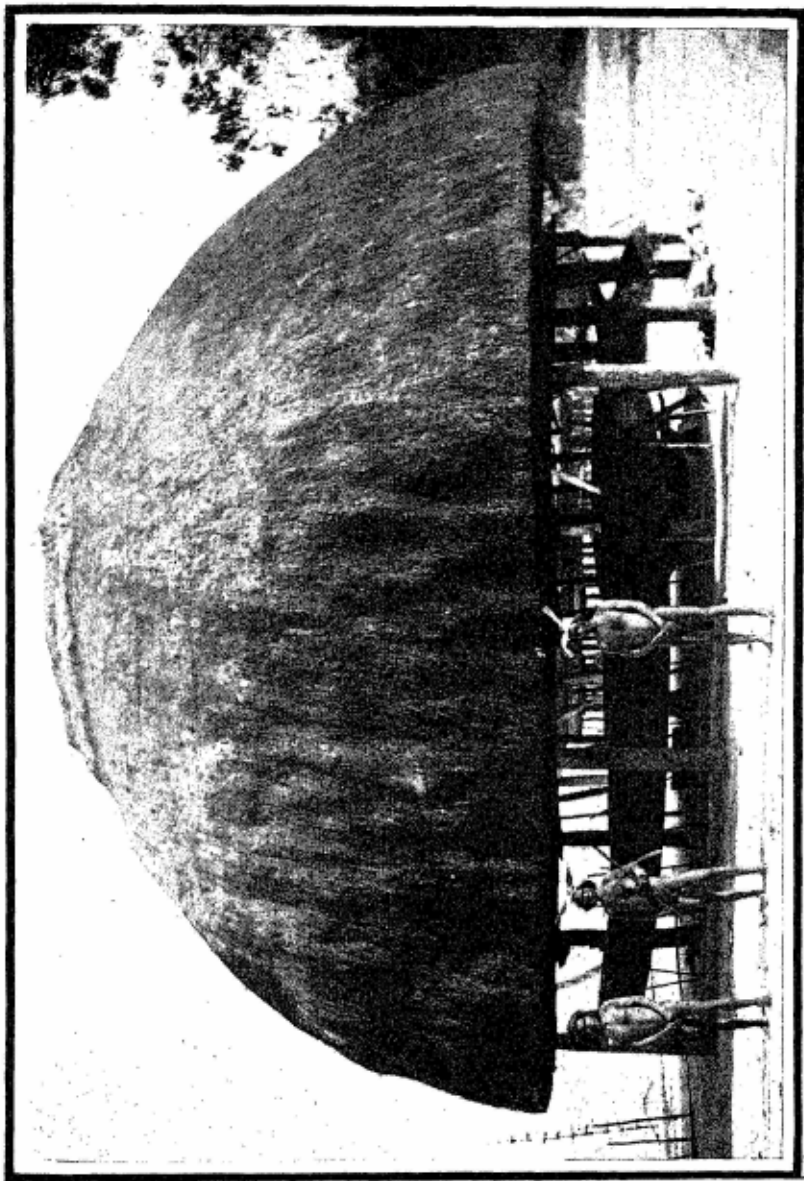
Nominally the rupee was formerly considered as equal in value to one hundred "single" nuts, but the Government considered this much too low a value, so the price was officially raised to sixty-four to the rupee, the value of the "single" nut (some of which are large and some small) being thus fixed at one pice, which at the normal rate of exchange is exactly one farthing. The Government was also desirous of introducing the Indian coinage to oust this system of barter; and the matter seemed relatively easy, for the dollar and the rupee and the small two-anna bit had long been used as jewellery and for decorative purposes; so it was made illegal to refuse to give (or to accept) money for goods on sale. The great advantage that the Nicobarese would gain from having a silver currency would consist in their being able to dispose of their nuts just at the season when they were ripe, whether or not they wished to purchase goods then and there. But they have not much anxiety for the morrow, and are not desirous of any change in their currency; whilst the trading firms dislike the new regulation, as they wish to have the double profit in the one business transaction—viz. on the goods they part with and on the goods they receive; and more than this, the use of money would make it so much more feasible for their employees to cheat them. When nuts form the currency of the market it is hardly possible for the dishonest man to steal from his employer's till, though he may indeed dispose of goods illegally for certain considerations, as the gratification of his appetites, or with other aims; or he may simply waste the goods. So the working rule in the shops seems to be that only

the general manager of any firm will supply goods for cash. I do not remember to have seen rupees used to any large extent by the Nicobarese except on one occasion, and then they were buried in the coffin of the wife of one of the richer men, so that she might be gratified at the way in which she was being treated, and so be less inclined to annoy those still remaining in the land of the living.

As the Nicobarese are improvident and thriftless, they are naturally ready to receive goods in hand on the promise of making a payment in the indefinite future. As I was on my way to Port Blair in the station ship, on my first visit to the Nicobar Islands, I was informed that the natives were in debt to the traders to the tune of millions of nuts. I was anxious about this, as one had seen too much in Burma of the way in which the richest lands are to a large degree gradually passing out of the hands of the improvident Burmese into the hands of the more frugal and industrious Indian immigrant, money-lender or labourer; so I took the first opportunity of speaking to the Chief Commissioner on the subject. He assured me that I had not the least occasion for anxiety about the economic results of the indebtedness of the Nicobarese to the traders, for the Nicobarese could neither alienate their lands nor mortgage their crops; that the Indian Civil Code did not fully run in the islands, and that the only hold that the traders had on the Nicobarese was due to their general honesty and willingness to pay their debts—when they had a convenient season. Since that time there has been a kind of commission investigating the amount of indebtedness, and cutting

down very considerably the pretensions of the traders. It was declared to be illegal to contract any new debt; in future all purchases were to be paid for, cash (*i.e.* nuts or money) down. But this regulation would hardly be feasible in any case, and there does not seem to have been any strenuous attempt to keep loyally to the spirit of it.

A few years ago, and still more or less so to-day, the trader would invite to his shop someone whom he knew to be fairly rich—that is, to be the owner of a tolerably large number of coco-palms — and would treat him hospitably, giving him tobacco and lemonade and other slight presents. He would then show him any goods he had which he thought might appeal to the man's acquisitive proclivities—cloth and spoons for display, rice and tobacco for consumption, or choppers (*dahs*) and plates for use. If the Nicobarese saw anything that he would like to have, as he generally did, the trader would urge him to take it, even though the man told him that he had no nuts in hand, and the ones now ripening on his trees were promised to some other trader for goods which had been received some time ago. If the Nicobarese did not come to the shop, the trader would take the goods round to the man's house and persuade him to take them. Occasionally in this way a Nicobarese man or woman would somewhat lightly take a quantity of goods of the supposed value of many thousand (pairs of) nuts; which debt he would be paying off for many years to come. "They make us have the things. I don't want them; and I have no nuts now. Can't I send the things back again to the shop?" said



THE VILLAGE HALL AT CHOK-CHUA-CHA,

with the village canoe resting under it. The hall and the canoe are more or less regarded as sacred. The bamboo erected at the water's edge, with leaves tied to it, is the only kind of "scare-devil" ordinarily used in Car Nicobar.





"Mr Crow" to me one day. Of course the "making" consisted merely in a crafty appeal to the man's acquisitive propensities.

As there was no Nicobarese writing, the trader would give the Nicobarese man a tally-stick on which were cut a number of notches showing how many thousands, hundreds and tens of (pairs of) nuts the man was owing; and when he made any payment of nuts, or bought any more goods, the tally-stick was corrected by the tradesman and returned to the Nicobarese. The general policy of the traders was to attempt to secure their client to themselves, and whenever he made any considerable payment they would urge him to take more goods. When the debt was fully paid the tally-stick was to be thrown away; and nothing but a sense of honesty prevented a Nicobarese man from throwing away his stick at any time and repudiating his debt. I have only once heard of this having been done, where the offender was a good lady of Malacca. The Nicobarese now call that village Palire, which means "their own lies"—I suppose the lies of the traders, though occasionally, as in this case, the lies of the Nicobarese. On the other hand, the Nicobarese are very careless, and the stick often gets lost, and they go on paying long after the debt has been liquidated.

The traders have, of course, their own accounts, written generally in Hindustani, but frequently there have been changes in their establishment, or there has been fraud on the part of the shopmen or the firm, and when a reputable man like Rinānga of Malacca, the husband of the aforementioned lady,

declared before the Government Agent that he had fully paid the ten thousand pairs of nuts for goods purchased some years before from a deceased agent of the firm, the firm at once withdrew their claim for anything more on that score.

The code of honesty and truth-speaking which the Nicobarese have (or had) among themselves did not necessarily demand the application of the same standard in their dealings with foreigners, and it was primarily to settle disputes which might arise between the traders and the Nicobarese that the Government Agent was first appointed. On one occasion the man who should have remained in charge of his shop was away for some weeks at a friend's place on the other side of the island, and he had left no one in charge of his shop. On his return he found that a big hole had been made in the wall at the back, which was mainly of coco-palm leaf, and a large quantity of goods, mainly *dahs* (or choppers), axes and other hardware, had been stolen. On inquiry he soon found out that three Nicobarese people had been selling such goods in the village at a very low rate. When he went to the purchasers they readily showed him the things they had bought, which the shopman identified as among the things stolen from his shop; and then he went to tell the Agent. The Agent went down to the village, and called the headman and all the elders of the village together, and spoke of the disgrace brought on the village by such a theft. He then gave the order through them that all who had bought hardware or other goods from the three suspected persons within the last month

were to bring those same goods to him, otherwise they could be regarded only as receivers of stolen property. Very soon more goods were returned than the shopman knew to be missing, though he was able to identify the goods as such as his firm alone supplied. As a lesson to the village it was put on three days *corvée* work, each house having to supply one labourer, male or female, though, on account of the loyal way in which the village had returned the goods, the persons who had actually stolen the goods were not brought officially before the Magistrate on his visit; but justice was satisfied by its being left to the village assembly (*kam-hô-ka*) to inflict a whipping on them in the presence of the Government Agent.

There are sundry fertile causes of petty quarrels between the Nicobarese and the traders. The Nicobarese have a great number of pigs, which not infrequently would break through the fence by which the nuts of the trader were protected, and would eat a quantity of them; for they are sometimes able to get through both the husk and the shell of the ripe nut. The Mohammedan traders would rush out with *dahs* or spears to drive the unclean beasts away, and would wound them if they could. Again, the traders have introduced goats into the island in order to have a change of diet, of flesh and milk alike, as well as to have a suitable animal for sacrifice when the festival of Bakri-id comes round. These goats go prowling around everywhere, and get even at vegetables and young palms which are safe from the pigs. The Nicobarese turn their dogs on the goats, and sometimes the goats are worried to death, or die of festering wounds.

When I was appealed to in such cases I took the line that, as the Nicobarese were here with their pigs long before the traders came, it was the business of the traders to make such fences round their premises that the pigs could not get at their nuts; and for the same reason it was their duty to keep their goats away from the gardens of the Nicobarese by having them tethered, or by some other means. Where the traders had in wrath killed a pig belonging to the Nicobarese, the Nicobarese should take the dead pig, and the trader must make the owner a "present," more truly a *quid pro quo*, in compensation for such loss as he had sustained; whilst if the Nicobarese dogs had been worrying goats, the traders would take the goats, and the Nicobarese should kill such dogs as had been known to worry goats previously, and, further, they should be ready to give assistance to the trader in the way of supplying labour (at the market rate) when he should require it. Indeed in many cases people who came with angry complaints went away on quite friendly terms; whilst in the short time that I was acting as Government Agent I came across no case of opposition on the part of either the Nicobarese or the traders to the decision given, though one had neither legal nor material power behind one—one was merely in the position of the unbiassed mutual friend, whose decisions, if objected to by them, would almost certainly be upheld with a strong hand by the Magistrate on his visit.

Another cause of trouble was the scarcity of labour, or rather the general unwillingness of the Nicobarese to do any work except under special conditions. A

trader's shop or his fence was tumbling down and he could not get anyone to do the needful work; so he was occasionally tempted to use violence, or (if a Burman) he would threaten harm by magic, if the work were not done.

The Nicobarese are generally ready enough to complain about the treatment they receive, at least to anyone who will give them a patient and compassionate hearing. I had not held office as Government Agent many days before a big party came up from Malacca (six or eight miles away) with sundry complaints. One of these, by the statements of the complainants themselves, was that a certain trader had struck a lad of about sixteen years of age on the side of the head. Certainly he had given him only one slap with his open hand, and it was not a hard slap. The lad in question had been working for the trader, and before the work was finished he had gone off and was working for another man, and when his late employer had accidentally come across him in the road he had struck him thus. I told the people that this was really too trivial a case for which to summon the trader, but that on my next visit to his village I would warn him not to beat people; which I did.

In the other cases the parties and witnesses were summoned by a note which the Government Agent wrote in English stating when and where they were to appear; and the notice was stamped with a rubber stamp. The complainants were to take the notices, and also verbally to inform the parties, for it might happen that no one could read them, though in the larger villages there might be some trader who could

read and speak English, or some Nicobarese child that had learnt to read in the mission school; whilst several of the elders might understand the English if they heard the notice read. Very rarely was this summons disregarded; and whenever it happened a second summons would be sent by the hand of the Government peon. I had no case of this second summons being disregarded.

When there was any considerable amount of work to be done, and the terms had been agreed upon, the trader would give a considerable part of the remuneration before the work was actually begun, and the remainder of the "present" (as it was called) when the work was finished. In one case two headmen came to complain that they had never received their "present" for the work they had done. The trader when questioned said that the amount of the work was very slight, and that the men had been extremely lazy about it; but that he had paid them by crediting their account with the amount agreed upon, and that he had cut down the amount of their indebtedness on the men's own tally-sticks. When it all came out, the headmen did not deny his statements, but seemed amused that they had not taken in the Agent; and they went away on better terms with the shopman than they had been on for some time.

The traders have also occasional quarrels among themselves, which the Agent has to settle as best he may.

Indolent and unwilling to work as the Car Nicobarese generally are, they are still occasionally persuaded to go with the traders for several months to cut and

collect nuts at Nancowry (or Camorta, rather), or even in the Cocos Islands. In these cases they receive a large advance payment. Before they can be taken away the Government Agent must interview them, and see that they understand what they are undertaking. The traders will feed and clothe and house their labourers whilst they are away, and will bring them back at the end of their time. Sometimes one or two of the Nicobarese will go away with the traders to the island of Manicoi, or to the Laccadive or Maldive Islands, far away in the Arabian Sea, to a land like unto their own. They may stay there two or three years, and will come back professed Moslems, and will wear Moslem dress; but their faith sits very lightly upon them, except when they are in company with Moslems. One foreign Mohammedan, from Maulmain, in Burma, went so far in forgetting the ordinances of his religion as to join in the pork-eating festival of the Nicobarese. The elders of his community got him out of the island as soon as possible, partly out of shame or disgrace, but mainly because they feared that some of the more fanatical of their company might kill the man and get the community into trouble. At Malacca the Mohammedan traders have a mosque of no great pretensions or comfort; they have also their *moollah* to hold service and to give them instruction on Fridays—their worship day.

One unfortunate result of the coming of the foreign sailors and traders has been the introduction of venereal disease into the island; and owing to their lax moral code in sexual matters, and to their gross negligence in any matter that requires continued watchfulness, the



danger to the Nicobarese is very great. The Government has always been wide awake to this danger, and the disease is not very widespread. At the present time there is a small hospital in the island, in charge of a retired Indian apothecary who seems to have a real care for the welfare of the people.

## CHAPTER V

### THE OCCUPATIONS OF THE PEOPLE

**B**EYOND the cooking of their food, and apart from their festivals and their amusements, the chief ordinary occupations of the people are concerned with their gardens and their coco-nut plantations; and with the latter of these is connected their keeping of pigs, which is also a keen source of pleasure—as is their fishing.

The gardens are generally made by a sept, or perhaps rather by a rich man and his relatives and dependents, though sometimes two or more poorer men will join together in an independent piece of work. If the would-be cultivators are not themselves landowners, they will intimate to the owner their wish to cultivate a certain plot in the unoccupied jungle. The plot may be from half-an-acre to several acres in extent. Permission is readily given unless the landowner or his friends have been thinking of cultivating that very spot, when some other site will be selected. Probably the same ground was cultivated some thirty or forty years before, and there are some old coco-palms which do not bear much fruit, and which belong to the cultivator. These will be chopped down and cut in lengths of about eight feet, and split up to form the fence of the new garden. Some of the larger trees may be left standing, but all the smaller ones and the jungle undergrowth must be chopped down. Suitable

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pieces of wood are chosen for stakes for the fence and for other purposes, and the refuse will be burnt out of the way, the ash serving to manure the garden. The making of the fence is laborious work, and it is supposed that the method which is almost universally adopted was introduced by the Danish Moravian missionaries and settlers at Nancowry in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and was gradually copied by all the Nicobarese—for they are not loath to copy in many respects the ways of foreigners. Two not very thick posts are driven firmly into the ground at a distance of from ten to twelve inches from each other, and similarly others about six feet away in a zigzag line. Pieces of the split trunk of the coco-palm are then placed between the posts, with one end just projecting beyond the posts and the other end between and beyond the next two posts, to the right and to the left alternately. Then when the required height, which is about four feet, is reached the two posts are tied together at the top with cane or some other suitable material; and when the circle is completed a tolerably good fence has been constructed, which with a little attention will keep the pigs out of the garden. No gate is made into the garden, for no Nicobarese, not even the owner, could be depended upon to shut the gate properly every time he went in and out of the garden; so one enters the garden by climbing the fence, which is no difficult matter.

At the beginning of the rains, after the fence is completed, the people whose garden it is will invite all their friends to come to their assistance, and they will plant all their yams (or at least all of the big

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variety) on the one day—the men digging up the ground, and the women cutting up the yams cross-wise, breaking up the clods with their hands and putting the seed into the soft soil. In the evening there will be a big feast for all the workers: a pig will be killed, and there will be plenty of *pandanus* paste, and of toddy too for the older ones and such as like it. The preparation of the *pandanus* paste had made the women of the house busy for the previous two days. If the other varieties of yams were also ready they might be planted at the same time, but more likely they will be planted later on. In the garden they also plant coco-nuts, *pandanus*, bananas, pine-apples, papayas, sugar-canes, pumpkins, and often fruit-trees like sweet limes, shaddocks, custard-apples and the jack-fruit.

The weeds must be cleared from time to time; and also the fence must be looked to, for the pigs are very energetic in their search for food. With a little looking after the fence will last for four or five years, when the young palms and other fruit-trees will be out of danger from the pigs. In this way the coco-nut plantations in the interior of the island are maintained, for each year a new plot of ground is selected for the garden. The jungle is always more or less the haunt of spirits who are dangerous to living men; and most of all so when the trees under whose leaves they take refuge are being cut down, and they are (as it were) being dispossessed of shelter and home. So all the people who are engaged in the work of making a new garden often wear round their neck or head or

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breast wreaths made of the fresh green centre leaf of the banana split and plaited.

When the yams are ready for getting up, all their friends are again in like manner called to the assistance of the owners of the garden, and the year's supply will be got up in one day. The universal *dah* (or chopper) is used in getting up the yams, and not a spade or fork; indeed a fork could not be used, the ground would be too hard.

The Nicobarese do very little work in connection with the planting of the coco-nut. Often they merely put a nut on the ground in what they consider to be a suitable place for a palm to grow, and leave it to fight its own battle with the weeds and overgrowing vegetation; whilst in the neighbourhood of Arong, where the palm groves are much more extensive in proportion to the population and to the number of the pigs, the palms have been ordinarily self-planted. The pig is so persistent in his endeavours that, whether he can actually succeed or not in tearing up the husk and breaking the shell of the nut, he can effectually prevent it from growing; whilst if the nut had escaped his notice for a whole year he would still have much pleasure in rooting up the young plant and in munching the rotting substance he found still within the decaying shell. So in ordinary times nuts are not planted except in the gardens away in the jungle, only, it may be, here and there a few nuts, where a strong fence has been put up to protect the betel plant. It would be quite impossible to imagine the Nicobarese for five years together keeping up fences wholesale in such a condition as to keep out the

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pigs. So it is the custom every thirty years or so for the people of all the eastern villages to agree to take away all their pigs from the neighbourhood of the coast into their hinterland. Then they will plant down many hundreds of thousands of nuts to grow up to take the place of trees which have died down, or which are getting old and are not able to bear much fruit. In order to reduce their stock of pigs with pleasure to themselves, special secular pork-eating festivals, over and above the regular and semi-religious feasts, are often held by villages which are sending away their pigs into the hinterland or to their friends in the far-away villages. The traders' goats and the cattle and the few ponies also should have been sent away, but I am afraid that in the neighbourhood of Mus village there was very considerable loss to the Nicobarese through this requirement not having been thoroughly carried out. The pigs and the other animals should be kept away for five years, until the young palms are safe from the pigs and goats. Of course the two southern villages, and the two villages on the north and west coasts, arrange their own time for sending away their pigs, and naturally they do not choose the same time as the eastern villages do. The Nicobarese law is that any pig found loose and straying about within the prohibited area is to be killed on sight and its body given to the owner. Pigs and other animals may be brought into the village, but they must be kept in pens, or be tethered; and as long as they do not get away they are free from molestation, but short shrift would be given them if they should get from under control.

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The coco-palm requires no attention beyond the clearing away of the grasses and bushes which for the first two or three years might imperil the life or energy of the young palm. The Nicobarese do not even in the dry weather water the nuts they have planted; they expect nature to do that for them. The palms are generally planted much too densely, and the shade in the heat of the day in many of the groves is excellent all the year round. The palms grow two crops of nuts in the year, a good crop being about fifty nuts, and different palms are bearing all the year round.

The Nicobarese man or woman easily climbs the coco-palm with the help of a little circle of rope made from the strands of the palm leaf. The rope is held by the heels and feet of the climber, who takes up with him the light *dah* (or chopper), which is thrust within the string of his loin-cloth, at his back. On getting up among the leaves he will hold on by his legs and left arm, and with his right arm will lash out and cut off the nuts which he sees to be ripe. They are let fall as they may, in many cases from a height of more than fifty feet. If the ground is hard or stony many of the nuts will be cracked, but they will of course come in useful for the pigs, etc. After cutting the ripe nuts on any one tree, and descending, the person will very rightly rest a while, as the slightest overbalancing of himself or the tiredness of a muscle would easily result in a fatal accident. Despite the skill of the Nicobarese, such accidents, fatal or otherwise, are not very uncommon; sometimes a man falls on his own *dah*. Some of the coco-palms are crooked

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and bent, and these are especially dangerous. On one occasion some of our children were cutting down some nuts and I noticed that the one very big lad was sitting down and watching the others work. I found, however, that he had been cutting down nuts a short time before, and that now, whilst he was resting, he sent the smaller boys to try their hands on some easy low palms. When they came down he took one of the more dangerous trees as his task.

The Nicobarese children have not the spirit of wilfully running into danger that English children often have to their cost; though they love adventure, they will readily obey an elder if he tells them that something is too difficult or too dangerous for them; whilst, speaking generally, the elder children have a deeper feeling of responsibility for the younger ones than English children would have, especially if they were not their own brothers or sisters. As the life of the people is mainly spent in or near the shade of palms, it is astonishing how few people are killed by the casual falling of nuts during a storm or at other times. On one occasion one of our big girls was stunned by a ripe nut falling on her head; but the black hair was dense and the skull was thick and she was quite well again in a few days.

There are no squirrels and no monkeys found in Car Nicobar, but there is a small rat which does an enormous amount of damage. In 1912 I calculated that more than 33 per cent. of the nuts which grow on the trees are eaten (or pierced and destroyed rather than fully eaten) by the rats. I have no reason to think that the conditions are much different to-day.



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As the palms bear nuts tolerably evenly all the year round, one is astonished that the rats do not multiply so greatly as to leave no nuts at all for the people. I believe that in the Maldives and the Laccadives, where conditions are so similar to those prevailing in the Nicobar Islands, the rats and the black cricket (which eats the sprouting leaves of the palm and thereby damages its power of bearing fruit) have between them so diminished the yield of the plantations that the old population can only be maintained now by a considerable proportion of the men going abroad to earn a livelihood.

The coco-palm is the mainstay of Nicobarese life, both directly and indirectly. Their food and drink is mainly the flesh and liquid of the green nut; and the ripe nut is their chief article of export, and also forms their currency. The oil which they sometimes crudely make by crushing the half-roasted flesh of the ripe nut is used for rubbing on their bodies, and is considered a protection against both sun and rain, though castor oil and turpentine are now generally preferred for personal lubrication, as kerosene oil is preferred for lighting purposes. The bunch of twigs which bears the nuts is often used as a ready-made brush, whilst the ordinary brush used by sweepers in India is made of the strands of the leaf. Again, the yoke for carrying loads (of from twenty to forty pairs of nuts) is generally a thickish piece of the stem of the leaf of the palm, whilst the dry leaf itself is used as a torch. Again, though foreign woven material is now always used for the sails of the canoes in which men travel, the palm leaf is still used for the sails of rafts and toy boats. A tolerably

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effective roof for a house and passable walls for a hut can also be made of palm leaf; whilst the trunk can be sawn into ready-rounded posts, or split up for making fences.

Formerly the traders used to take away the nuts as such; nowadays, on account of the increased cost of the freight, they prefer to take them as *kopra*. Some hundreds of ripe nuts will be laid out singly on the ground, and are then each cut in two with one blow of a very heavy *dah* (made specially for this purpose). Then with special knives the flesh is very easily taken out, and it is spread in the sun. If the weather continues fine for three or four days all is well, and the *kopra* in good condition; but the Nicobarese weather cannot be depended on, and often the *kopra* is sadly spoilt. The traders also are so keen on getting the nuts that they are ready to take such as are not yet fully ripe, though the *kopra* in such cases is necessarily very inferior both in quantity and quality. The shell with the fibrous husk is burnt or cast aside.

Besides the ordinary coco-nut there are two other varieties—or possibly they may be freaks—found tolerably frequently. One is the extremely small nut, called *kali*, the shell being only three or four inches in length. This has a commercial value, as it is in request as the bowl of the Indian hubble-bubble. The other is the rather large butter-nut: it contains no liquid, and the flesh, which is softer and sweeter than the ordinary ripe nut, is rather liked as food, but is useless for making *kopra*.

The pigs and fowls naturally find much food for

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themselves, but are also fed by the people with coco-nut. The minimum given to each adult pig is four ripe nuts a day—two in the morning and two in the evening. The pigs will roam around during the daytime, and will come in for their food when their owners call them. All the pigs have their ears marked (by cutting) with their owner's mark; but the owner and his wife would know them very well in any case, for they handle them tenderly and pet them and talk to them lovingly. The pigs, too, all know their owner's voice, and do not run when a stranger calls. The pig-trough is often the huge shell of the giant clam, but it is also often made of wood. Formerly a person who had leisure and nuts at his disposal would often rear pigs for a friend, the profits being divided between the two parties—somewhat unfairly for the poorer party, as it would seem to us, for the owner of the pigs received half of the increase. Now that the people see that the nuts have in themselves a market value they generally prefer to dispose of them otherwise. When a person is convicted by the *kam-hô-ka* (or *panchayet*, as the Indians call the assembly of the elders) of adultery, or dishonesty, or some other offence, the penalty is generally a fine of one or more pigs.

Fishing is a great business, and a great pleasure too. The young lads, and also the Indian traders, will often try to catch a few small fish by angling, or with a cast net which is thrown into the shallow water as a big wave is rushing along. The Nicobarese youths will also go out with a three-pronged spear to where the waves break, and will try to spear

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any biggish fish which they may see being momentarily thrown up by the wave. This requires great quickness of vision and great agility; and of course one must be standing just in the right place at the moment or the opportunity is missed. Occasionally patient waiting in readiness is rewarded by the capture of a fish weighing a few pounds; but this work cannot be depended upon to supply food for one's breakfast. Again, at low water men and women will sometimes hunt for crabs among the rocks.

Sometimes where there is a reach of comparatively shallow water at high tide, shortly before the tide turns a great number of men and women will get some way out in the water, in a kind of chain, and will splash about and keep dashing small boughs of trees into the water, to prevent the fish which have come along with the tide from returning with it again. So the fish get into small shallow pools, or are stranded on the sand, and so are caught. Where there is a pool of some depth ordinarily left behind when the tide has gone out, the people will act in like manner to prevent the fish getting back into the sea. Then they will poison the fish in the pool, by sprinkling on the water the grated *kinyav* seeds mixed with ashes. "Some big fish die, others do not, and these last we shoot with bow and arrow, or strike them with *dahs* [choppers]. We are a long time over it, for we have to wait for the different kinds of eels to come up, and when they do come out we strike them with a *dah*. Then we go home, and gut and scrape the fish, and put them on a split stick, and roast them." They also know how to cook fish by steaming.

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Among such rocks as are never left dry there are frequently various kinds of octopus, from eighteen inches to four feet in length. These are valued as food, but still more as bait for fishing with long lines out in the open sea. I have never heard of anyone losing his life from the octopus; but an old man who had hold of a large one, and would not let it go, was dragged into the water by it, but he suffered no harm. The sting pains one only for the moment. These octopuses are generally caught at night, when they are attracted by the glare of palm-leaf torches. With the octopus bait men and boys will be out in the open sea the whole day, fishing with lines sometimes as much as a hundred yards long. Occasionally when they have hooked a fine fish and are hauling it in a shark will come along and take off the fish, and pull the canoe along too unless the men let go of the line. As the Nicobarese buy good English hooks and lines they are very loath to lose them in addition to the fish which they were regarding as secure, and I have seen the flesh of a man's fingers worn away to the bone because he continued to hold on to the line which was, however, slipping from his grasp, as the shark was towing off the canoe, and after all he had to let it go.

Occasionally they have a night's fishing out in the open sea, when they spear the fish lured by torch-light.

When the men get in after a day's or a night's fishing, which in every case means some danger and much labour in paddling the canoe, the women have hot water prepared for them for an *al-fresco* bath, and if they have been successful there will be a good feed before they sleep off their weariness.

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Once a year, at the end of the south-west monsoon, they have an exorcism to prevent evil befalling anyone from eating fish. They go out for the first time in the season to fish with long lines. When they come back in the evening they will mash up some of the fish uncooked, and will mix it with grated coco-nut, and this they put on the top of their fowl-houses. Small pieces of fish are also strung on a variety of small fern, one piece being placed on each fern, and these are hung round the walls of the house. Also three tiny young coco-nuts, not half grown, are tied below the cross-beams of the store-loft of the house. The witch-doctors (*tō-mi-lūō-nō*) do not take any part in this rite. This function is repeated about a month later, after they have been out fishing off the west coast for the first time for the season.

Next after the coco-nuts and the yams the most essential article of food for the Nicobarese has been the *pandanus*, or *mellori*, as the Portuguese called it. By the English it is always locally known as the "bread-fruit," though it is not the same as the bread-fruit of the Pacific isles. It is a rambling tree of no great height, with very soft wood or fibre, and like the banyan sends down many shoots or suckers into the ground. It is found both wild and under cultivation; but in Car Nicobar the wild fruit is not now used for food by the people—it would be only a case of "much cry and little wool"; it is, however, cut down to serve as fodder for the pigs. The cultivated fruit will often be a foot or more long, and thirty inches in circumference, and may weigh as much as fifty pounds. There is, however, much rind to be chipped away, and the

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amount of flesh round the many large stone seeds is not very great, at least comparatively speaking. An extra large pot is needed for the cooking of the *pandanus* paste, and the fire has to be kept up so long that the Nicobarese think the gathering of the firewood and the drawing of the water required to be quite a task. The fruit needs to be chopped up somewhat, to get it all well cooked, and a special kind of leaf is used as a lid to the pot, or afterwards to wrap the paste in. They test the *pandanus*, whether it is cooked sufficiently or no, by pinching it with their fingers. When it is sufficiently done they take it out of the pot, and, after scraping off the coarse outer parts, for the whole afternoon up to sunset they will be still engaged in scraping away with oyster shells the soft paste from the coarse fibre. After this they press it into a ball, and then pass many times through the ball strings made of strips of a special kind of bark. This is done to get away the stringy fibrous parts which may have been cut through and scooped in by the oyster shells. Then the paste is pressed into a roll, and some of it will be eaten without further cooking. The rest of it is again cooked, and will be left on the fire all night and eaten in the morning. As we have remarked before, in appearance, taste and nutritiousness, the *pandanus* paste does not differ largely from pease pudding. It is much prized by the Nicobarese generally, though some of the people prefer rice to it.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE AMUSEMENTS OF THE PEOPLE

THE chief amusements of the Nicobarese are canoe-racing and dancing; but they desire to find amusement in everything—their life, their work, their religious festivals, and even in their funerals. The Nicobarese have naturally a love for the sea, though in Car Nicobar there is no good harbour, nor any place where there is safe anchorage all the year round. The native brigs (Indian and Burmese) will often remain anchored in Sawi Bay or off Malacca as much as two miles from the shore, having out an almost incredible length of cable. The only steamer that ever normally comes to the island is the Government station ship of the Andaman Islands, on the periodic visits of the Magistrate. When the ship anchors a number of canoes will slowly come off with coco-nuts, *kali*, betel nuts, bananas, sweet limes, or whatever they may have to dispose of, and they will exchange these for bread, tins of condensed milk, tobacco or cast-off clothing.

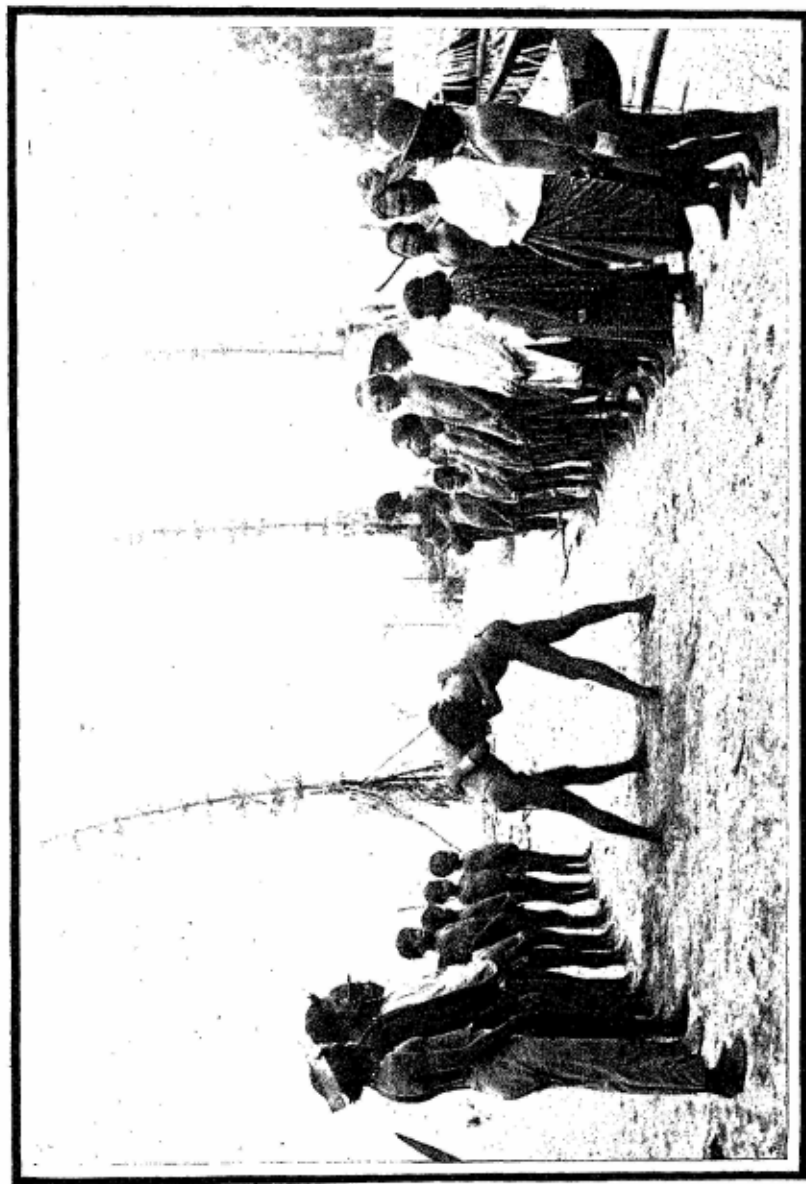
These canoes are sometimes very small, and can carry hardly more than one person; but sometimes their canoes are very large, and will carry thirty or forty persons, or even more. As we have said before, only the smaller canoes can be made in Car Nicobar, as there is no good timber in the island; the bigger boats, and all such as can ever be allowed to land at the



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holy island of Chowra, must have been purchased through the middlemen of Chowra from the people of the Central or the Southern Islands, but generally the fitting of the prow and the general finishing off of the work is done in Car Nicobar. Canoes are hollowed out of one huge log by axes and by fire. Then they fasten a large number of bars across the boat, and these serve to sit upon, or to place goods upon, as well as to strengthen the boat. Above the ends of these a bamboo will run along the edge of the canoe, and serves to prevent things from slipping easily into the water. The canoe will embrace some two-thirds of the circumference of the original log, and is therefore much deeper than one would have imagined. On this account, as also on account of its great length in proportion to its width, every canoe must have its outrigger, which is a smallish log, perhaps ten feet long and eight inches in diameter. The outrigger is fastened very carefully in its position, parallel to the canoe and some ten feet from it, bamboos being used as the connecting rods. It is not nailed, but tied with cords of natural rope, cane or bark; indeed nails and screws are used hardly at all in their boat-building. Both the bamboos and the cords are always carefully tested before any long sea voyage is attempted. The canoe as well as the outrigger is always constructed of wood that is lighter than water: if wood having a higher specific gravity than water were used there would be nearly as many wrecks as trips made. For coasting purposes the canoe may be regarded as a tolerably safe vessel.

When the station ship comes down to Car Nicobar



#### NICOBARESE YOUTHS WRESTLING.

Sports are a special mark of one of the subsidiary feasts following on the great Osmuary Feast. The bamboos erected with leaves, etc., tied to them, as well as those in the background as the others, are "scare-devils."



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it is only in the calmest weather that the long-boat or the captain's gig would be used for the actual landing. They must stay out beyond where the surf breaks, and passengers and goods alike will be landed in the canoes of the natives. On the east coast at Mus there is a coral reef out at some little distance from the shore, and it is only at a certain somewhat narrow place that one can cross the reef with any degree of safety; and sometimes the rocks are out of sight by reason of the waves being violent. When the canoe gets very near the shore, far past where the surf breaks, one must come in on a big wave, and then speedily jump on the sand and get up on the beach before the next wave comes along. If through the negligence of the steersman (there is no rudder) the canoe is taken sidewise by the wave, it will certainly be water-logged; and sometimes it is swamped despite all care. Two very big waves will not infrequently come, one just behind the other; and when the bow of the canoe is high on the crest of the first wave, and the stern down in the trough, the second wave dashes into the canoe and literally fills it with water, and one is thankful that the canoe is not broken by the violence of the water. The Nicobarese watch the waves closely, and count them, and they can form shrewd conjectures as to what the next waves will probably be like. I have been swamped only twice in landing or putting off in a canoe; in one case it was at some distance from the shore. Another Englishman was swamped three times in succession in the same afternoon; he made a fourth attempt and succeeded in getting safely to the ship.

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On one occasion in beautiful weather a merry party of young people were coming from the ship to bathe in the surf in Sawi Bay, and when larking about happened all to lean out on the contrary side of the canoe to that on which the outrigger was fastened, with the result that the outrigger instantly swung over their heads, and the canoe had turned turtle; but as no harm was done everyone regarded it as a huge joke. Still it is no mere ordinary risk to venture on a forty-mile ocean trip in one of the canoes, and in 1911 the Chowra boat, with fifty or sixty Chowra people on board, was wrecked on its trip to Car Nicobar, and only some ten persons were saved. Chowra would thus in one fell swoop lose one-fourth of its able-bodied male population.

Many of the richer people have tolerably large private canoes for fishing or transporting goods, for the annual trip to Chowra, and pre-eminently for boat-racing; and every village has its public canoe, which is almost a sacred thing, and may not be used for "unclean" or even for ordinary secular purposes, like the landing or shipping of goods or persons. Neither may children play around the village boat, nor may elders make use of it as an ordinary seat. When not being used it is always reverently placed under the "village hall," the large "good" (*i.e.* clean) house on the beach, which belongs to the whole community.

The owners of private canoes are generally very proud of them, and fond of racing them in competition with other boats and crews; but the pride in the village boat takes almost the character of public-spiritedness and patriotism. Yet this pride never leads

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to quarrels and ill feeling. The Nicobarese have the sporting spirit in the very highest degree, and in this respect (as in one or two other points) their conduct puts us Westerns to shame. They are very proud to show off their skill in competitions, but their delicacy of feeling forbids them attempting to shame their opponents, who certainly are not their "adversaries," but their "friends," their hosts or their guests. Soon after my first arrival in the island there happened to be a competition of the Mus boat and team with the boat and team of another village, and the old headman Offandi sent up to let me know and to urge me to come down and see it. I wanted to know which he considered the stronger team. "They are both excellent," he replied. In answer to my further inquiries I was told that there was no difference in skill between the two teams—neither party could be bettered. I also found out, somewhat to my astonishment, and on further consideration not a little to my approval of the ways of the unsophisticated, that in these races there is no starting-point and no winning-post; and that whilst they compete side by side, struggling for all they are worth, if one side begins to find that it is getting a little ahead of the other it will very soon slacken off a bit and let the others get ahead, that neither the hosts nor the guests may shame one another. There is naturally no betting on these races; and indeed the better class of the old Nicobarese could have nothing but contempt for the spirit which could derive any pleasure at all from the thought of a gain which could come only to oneself by the loss of one's friend (or comrade, *hol*). Youths are readily initiated

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into foreign vices, and I believe that the Nicobarese who in the war were in the Mechanical Transport Department in Mesopotamia soon became more keen gamblers than even their Burmese comrades; but the spirit of gambling (whether in matters large or small) is to the old-fashioned Nicobarese as contemptible as cowardice is to the mind of an English gentleman.

At every public race very many visitors will have come over from the village to which the other competing boat belongs, and also a number of people from other villages, and there will be a big feast for all comers in the "village hall," as the large quasi-sacred "clean" house on the beach in *el-panam* may be called. There will be an abundance of pork and yams, and of *pandanus* (if it is the right season for this fruit), and in these days rice also; whilst for drinks there will be plenty of coco-nuts, and of toddy for the elders (for the youthful palate generally prefers things sweet, not sour—like toddy). The visitors will challenge their hosts to compete with them on their own ground—that is, off their village—and the day will be fixed for another race, including of course another feast. The guests do not ordinarily return home until the morning after the race.

Besides the public races, as these may be called, and such as take place after the acquisition of a new canoe, or after a trip to Chowra, there are also frequent private races, when one man backs (without betting) his own canoe and team against that of his neighbour. If the owner of the boat is also one of the few land-owners he will himself provide only the pig for the feast, and his "tenantry" are expected to provide all else that is needed.

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Canoe races also form part of the last funeral feast, at the conclusion of which those in mourning and ceremonially unclean become purified again, and put on new garments. On these occasions a fowl is killed in sacrifice, its head is cut off and a little warm blood is dripped on the canoes.

The canoes, or the spirits of the canoes, are also fed with the blood of pigs or fowls, and with the head, legs and wings of chickens, at the annual "Harvest Festival" (*Kun-señ-řđ*), or after a visit to Chowra, and no doubt on many other occasions.

Where there is a good stretch of open but comparatively smooth water, as in the west part of Sawi Bay, the youths and others are very fond of racing with toy boats. These are sometimes as much as twenty feet in length, but they are very narrow. They have sails of palm leaf which the wind fills, blowing them across some tiny bay; or men will wade out into the deep water, taking the boats with them, and then releasing the boats will let the wind drive them to the shore. In all these feasts and amusements the women share, but not as competitors.

The Nicobarese are fond of music and song. Their efforts are naturally crude, but their music is really less unpleasant to European ears than is the purely Indian or Burmese music. Of all their songs the most popular are in praise of the canoe or the pig. These songs have many topical allusions, and are specially sung as an accompaniment to the dancing. They are somewhat rhythmical, and in style archaic, and often have many veiled or unveiled references to immoral acts. The Nicobarese have a kind of



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violin, and also a flageolet, of native manufacture, but they take readily to musical instruments from foreign lands—for example gramophones, concertinas, accordions and mouth organs, and also the Burmese dulcimer. Some of their popular songs are comparatively ancient, and these deal largely with folk-lore. They are difficult to comprehend, for the language is greatly different from that of daily life; and if one gets a translation of the poem one is not much wiser, unless one has also a commentary on each verse (see Appendix B). In 1912 the people of Perka village were so pleased with the poem of praise about their canoe which a man of Mus had composed that they had a special feast for all their friends throughout the whole island in honour of the Nicobarese Pindar.

The dances, to which the Nicobarese youth are passionately devoted, are of two kinds, secular and religious, but to the uninitiated there seems to be little or no difference between them. These latter are called the dances of the *ma-a-fāi* (*i.e.* of the novices to the witch-doctorate). The dances will often be attended by practically the whole of the young people of the place, and are kept up for many hours, night after night, when it is fair and the moon is bright, and on certain festivals dancing is kept up the whole night. The people may have been most of them asleep for a few hours, when the moon has now got up high above the palms, though such as are sleeping inside the houses will be in all but utter darkness. Then suddenly a youth or two will raise the cry for the dance, and in two or three minutes

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the young men and maidens, and often older folks as well, not only those living in that *tu-hēt* (group of houses), but many others within earshot in the stillness of the night, will troop down for an *al-fresco* dance in the smooth open space of the *tu-hēt*. Every *ma-a-fāi* (i.e. novice for the witch-doctorate) *must* dance *every* night for the year or so of his novitiate, unless there be mourning in the village, and so, as even the Nicobarese can grow satiated with dancing, the novices will at times go to other villages for the dancing. Besides the out-of-door dancing, dances of smaller numbers of people are also occasionally held inside the houses.

This dancing seems to Europeans the tamest proceeding imaginable. A large circle, or segment of a circle, is formed by the dancers, the men and boys and the women and girls being mainly arranged according to their sex. Each one places his right hand on the next one's shoulder, and sways his body and kicks about his legs in tune, jumping in union and coming down on both heels, all the while chanting a song, nonsensical or otherwise. The "dancing" approximates more to the posturing of the Burmans and the Indians than to dancing as we understand the term; in itself their dancing is morally quite unobjectionable.

Especially at *Ka-na-an Ha-un* (the Ossuary Feast) the proud dancers of a village will render a new dance, with a new song to accompany it. In such a case perhaps there may be a dozen long pieces in the set, and four or five short pieces. They begin with these short pieces, and then after each

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long piece, excepting the last, they sing and dance these short pieces over again. Also at the end of each long piece there may be yet another dance, with the accompaniment of a song partly at least in English, Burmese or Hindustani, as many foreign expressions being used as the singers can manage. The Nicobarese have wondrous staying powers in the dance if in nothing else. Sometimes not one individual indeed, but the company, will keep up dancing for more than twenty-four hours, and then after a feed and a sleep of six hours they will begin again.

Occasionally the youth of a village will go a-hunting the wild pigs, which are said to be fairly numerous in the uninhabited parts of the island. I have never seen traces of them myself, nor have the hunts indulged in by the village of Mus ever been very successful of late years. The young men will all go armed with *dahs* (choppers) or spears, and often have with them rather fierce big dogs which have been trained for hunting. Often these hunts, which one is tempted to regard as a kind of paper chase *minus* the paper, will punctuate two solemn rest days, when work or vigorous exercise or even a slow walk into the jungle is tabooed; for the witch-doctors do not seem bereft of that supposed trait of priesthoods—a worldly wisdom in support of their own claims and pretensions.

Playing with the pigs, or rather teasing them until they attempt to bite, is a common amusement at all times, but as the most skilled exhibitions take place at the Ossuary Feast a description of this will be given in a later chapter.

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They also have a strange kind of single-stick fencing, and amuse themselves on certain occasions with trundling small immature coco-nuts between two rows of lads, who with pointed sticks try to spear them as they roll along. Both these exercises, at least when they form part of their regular feasts, would by origin partake of the nature of "religious" duty rather than of amusement, though none of them would be able to give any true explanation of the meaning of the customs.

The Nicobarese youth take readily to English football; but they are not very particular about the keeping of the rules of the game, for they would normally prefer to see themselves kick the ball a very great height or distance than to kick a goal.

## CHAPTER VII

### BIRTH CUSTOMS

THE rules and customs that regulate the conduct and intercourse of the young people are in the main both few and lax. They can move about freely, much as they choose, though it would hardly be considered seemly for a young woman to be going about alone on an unfrequented path. They have also their ideas of relationship and consanguinity, and marriages may not take place within the prohibited degrees. The idea of chastity is unfamiliar, and there is very little endeavour after purity. I have heard an elder, who was certainly somewhat deficient in intelligence, in giving evidence in a case relative to the possession of some property in the days of his youth, say: "When I used to go a-courting So-and-so" (but more literally the words were: "When I used as a young unmarried man to go to have sexual intercourse with an unmarried girl"—the actual name of the person being given). Whether this girl afterwards became his lawful wife or not I do not know, but I do remember that his language caused neither remark nor amusement. There are, however, comparatively few cases where a mother cannot assign the paternity of her child, and where this would be denied by the putative father, though there is not infrequently the custom to exchange sweethearts for the occasion.

The sad lack of privacy in their houses, and the way

in which young and old of different families may all be sleeping together in one dark room, naturally leads not only to plain unvarnished language on all processes of nature, but often also to laxity of morals; whilst despite this laxity, which largely affects married women as well as maidens, cases where grown men have had intercourse with quite small children of ten or so are not very rare.

The marriage of two people is not a very great or solemn function, and the customs connected with it are very indefinite. Ordinarily the bridegroom will give presents to the father of the bride, and there would be a feast. Probably also a small piece of pork would be sent to each house, with the notification that the marriage festival of the two parties was now being held.

But if the customs and restrictions that attend marriage are few, those attending birth and infancy, or death, are legion. During the latter part at least, say two months, of the wife's pregnancy both parents must abstain from certain kinds of food and from certain actions, as also for some time after the birth. The restrictions are binding on the father as much as on the mother, and though the *couvade* does not prevail in its fullness in Car Nicobar there are traces of it in other matters than in restrictions about food. When the prospective mother goes down to *el-panam* (the beach where the birth and dead houses, etc., are) her husband goes along with her; though the less unsophisticated Car Nicobarese say that this is not due to the father's birth pains, but in order that he may be ready at all times to wait on his wife. On one

occasion I had an incorrigibly lazy dependent working for me; I said to him: "R., the Nicobarese are the laziest race I have ever come across, and you are the laziest Nicobarese man I have ever seen. What does your father-in-law say about you?" The answer came readily enough: "He does not like me to work hard, for it would be bad for the baby." Reasoning as the Nicobarese do on homœopathic principles, if it is bad for the sucking child when the mother works hard and gets into a state of profuse perspiration, surely it must after all be equally bad for the baby if the father should work hard.

If the home of the parties is at some considerable distance from the birth-houses a pregnant woman and her husband may go, some weeks before the child is expected, to live in or near *el-panam* in one of the "good" (*i.e.* ceremonially clean) houses on the beach or in the neighbourhood. In at least one of the villages, however, the birth-houses are not side by side with the dead-houses, much less identical with them, as is not infrequently the case, but away by themselves in the midst of the coco-palm grove—much like the ordinary *tu-hēt* (cluster of houses), only the birth-houses and neighbourhood were very much worse kept than any other group of Nicobarese houses that I have ever seen.

When the labour pains begin the woman goes to one of the birth-huts, for if she gave birth to a child in a "good" house, that would become ceremonially unclean and have to be pulled down and burnt; no one could live in it again. Some of the richer Nicobarese families have their own birth-hut, side by side with

the others, in order to have some small degree of privacy. There are always a number of women and their husbands living in *el-panam*, for they do not ordinarily leave for their own homes until perhaps three months after the birth of the child. When the young mothers living there hear the news that the labour pains have come on they will flock to shampoo the woman, and the inexperienced younger hands are taught the art of midwifery by the more experienced ones. If there is any delay in the delivery it is presumed to be due to the child being trapped or held or nipped by something homœopathically. So though diligent search had been made long before to make sure that no clothes or other belongings of the parents were shut or boxed up, or contained any knots, a new search is made, and care is taken that the door of the hut and the lids of all boxes near be left open, so that there may be a clear passage. The men will also lift up an inch or two the big racing canoes of the village and then put them back in the same place; and if there were any logs or other heavy things lying about they would lift them up or turn them over, in order to lighten the load of the spirit and to set the infant free. Similarly, neither a pregnant woman nor her husband should ever make anything tight, as nailing a board, or tying knots, for fear that the spirit of the unborn infant should get tied up in the knots, and that in consequence there would be great difficulty, if not impossibility, of delivery when the time should come. My munshi and interpreter, to whom I am to a very large extent indebted for whatever work I have done among the Nicobarese and for whatever knowledge I



may have of them and their customs, had spent five years of his youth in Burma, and so was not always mindful of his duty according to the lore of the Nicobarese. Finding time hanging heavy on his hands, he once began in his leisure hours to make a fishing net, when his parents-in-law reproved him strongly for his gross cruelty in thus foolishly and unthinkingly endangering the life of his wife and his unborn child.

Child-birth is easy, but not so to an abnormal extent, and there are probably more deaths in proportion at child-birth in Car Nicobar than in England. Both mother and baby are rubbed with saffron, and their clothes or wraps dyed with it. The mother is of course ceremonially unclean, and for some time she may not feed herself nor touch her food with her fingers.

A baby is named after the woman who first receives it into her hands, if a female; after her husband's name if it is a male. Such at least, so I am told, is the theory; but Nicobarese names do not ordinarily denote the sex of the person, and they may be changed. They have some scruples and fears about mentioning a person's real name, and I imagine that this is the reason why they so readily take to the foreign names and nicknames given them by Europeans or others; for the possession of the nickname would not enable their enemies to do them harm, whilst the knowledge of their real names might. Many of the Nicobarese names seem very natural to us, whilst others seem abnormally strange. Amongst such names are "Truthful," "Quick," "Story-teller," "He (or She) is to be kissed," "He (or She) does not cause peace," "Stick"

or "Plant," "It is not water," "It does not hurt," "How long will it be before he (or she) comes," "The Cause," "One who prepares," "Does not comfort," "Five," "The leaving behind," "Two-masted," "Struck on the face," "What was told," "He (or She) could not find the stick." Some of these names are very long, and the Nicobarese generally consider it quite enough, even with regard to English names, to say the first one or two syllables only.

The scruple about mentioning personal names is not confined to the names of human beings. Some fairies are supposed to live near the shore half-way between the villages of Mus and Sawi. They are not in the habit of injuring respectful travellers who go along the way quietly. Their names have been kept so secret that I almost think they have been forgotten; at any rate I did not learn their names. They are said to be fond of a certain kind of red yam, which they cook without the aid of fire. When travellers perceive a pleasant odour in this neighbourhood they will smack their lips and say pleasantly: "Ah! those who dwell at Pinsanglō are having a feast." Pinsanglō is the name of the jungle just in that neighbourhood; for every plot of ground, or big rock, or plantation, has its own proper name, as also have houses and canoes.

The husband looks after his wife, remaining with her in *el-panam* and supplying all her needs. "When the baby is still under a month old the father must not do any heavy work, nor walk in the sun, nor bathe in the sea, for they do not want the child to get sick," one said to me, thus illustrating the principle of the *couvade*.

Anyone who is able, and who chooses to do so, will

subsequently, at a time convenient to himself, give a feast to the women who came to shampoo his wife; no other payment for the service rendered could normally be tolerated by Nicobarese custom.

When the child is about a month or two old its ears are pierced. At first a piece of black cloth is put in the child's ear (as an earring), and afterwards, when the sore is healed, a small twig of the custard-apple is inserted.

The baby is bathed every day with warm water, and the greatest care must be taken not only that the right kind of vessel for containing the water is used, but also that no kind of wood be used as the fuel other than the three varieties which custom has approved (and even two of these are allowed only on sufferance). Convulsions, or what not, might be brought on by the slightest lapse, even involuntarily, from orthodox usage. After its bath the infant is rubbed with coco-nut oil and warmed (even in this climate) at the fire, or with hands which have been warmed at the fire. Of course the baby does not need any clothing. Sometimes the mother will get up in the middle of the night to bathe her child. At the first the water for bathing the baby must be heated in the shell of an unripe coco-nut which has been shaped for this purpose. The shell of the ripe nut would burn at once on being placed near the fire, but not so the shell of an unripe one, especially when it is full of water. After the baby is some two months old a Chowra pot of the shape and size of the coco-nut, which has been procured for this very purpose, must be used—one made in the holy (or unholy) land of magic.

When a child is two or three months old it is well rubbed all over with a strange concoction consisting of fowls' blood mixed with certain crushed leaves provided by the *tš-mi-lũš-nš* (witch-doctor) or by some other skilled person, and also with the crushed shells of young coco-nuts, and with turmeric (or saffron). This performance will be repeated monthly until the child can walk. As much blood as would fill an average-sized coco-nut shell is sometimes used. This blood is taken from eight or ten fowls, which have their mouths cut inside, and are then held wrong side up by the legs in order to cause the blood to flow out into the shell. These wretched fowls are not killed, but are let go, to recover and be operated upon again and again.

When the baby is now three months old, or perhaps more frequently five or six months old, they will all return to the village; but they must leave behind them everything they have been using whilst they have been staying in *el-panam*—clothing, mats, cooking pots, and whatever else they may have had—for these things would be "unclean," and their use would render the parties themselves again unclean; and also their own proper houses in the village would become unclean should those unclean things be brought into them. Sometimes the cloth that has been used, as garments or to lie upon, is torn up into shreds and thrown away, or it is spread out on the floor of the birth-hut and left for the use of its poorer occupants (whether such as are there at the time or such as may come later on).

The first food, over and above its mother's milk, that is given to a baby consists of the tenderest part of the flesh of the green coco-nut—that is, the part that is

nearest the shell. This is mixed with *pandanus* paste and warmed over the fire in a coco-nut shell. "The child must not eat fish until he is five or six years old; only after reaching that age may they have fish given them to eat. A pregnant woman, however, may eat fish, but not the woman who has a baby."

Mothers will naturally often kiss their babies, but their "kissing," like that of the Burmese, consists in embracing and rubbing faces and in sniffing the child; hence the Burmese saying: "If you do not love the person you still can sniff; if you do not even sniff you can at any rate hold your breath."

## CHAPTER VIII

### SICKNESS: ITS CAUSES & ITS REMEDIES

THE attention, and it is considerable, which the Nicobarese pay to the unseen powers which surround them and affect them for good or for evil partakes rather of the nature of magic than of religion, for not only do their minds chiefly dwell on the evils which the powers, or some of them, are supposed to bring upon them, but they also trust to means of compelling or terrifying the Powers into letting them alone, rather than to any coaxing or pleasing of them by any gift or special action, and so getting them to do any favour for them.

Of the existence of the unseen powers the Nicobarese have no doubt whatever; but as to what those powers may be some of the Nicobarese are apt to be very sceptical, for they are a fairly intelligent people, whilst the art and science of their witch-doctors is so crude as to be a laughing-stock to young and old, who are not, however, entirely emancipated from belief in these superstitions.

The Car Nicobarese dignify the spirit of man by the glorious name of "the master of the body (or flesh)" (*ma-a-la-ha*), though, like many other masters, this master has most imperfect rule over his rebellious minion; indeed he is practically dethroned, and the slave rules his master, rather than the master his slave. Like the Burmese, they think that the spirit

can go away on its own travels, leaving the body behind, and that this is the cause of dreams. So they do not like to awaken suddenly any sleeper, lest the spirit might be away at the time, and might get flurried by the interruption, and never get comfortably home again; in which case the results might be very serious. The Nicobarese also further believe that one's spirit might get left behind in any place whither it had gone with the body; or that it might take temporary rest and shelter in some hole or crevice, or under the boughs of a tree, and so get lost. The person might not know anything about it at the time, though before long he would sicken and die if the spirit could not be brought back.

The spirits of the departed live in the marshy flat and malarious land in the centre of Car Nicobar—at least that is their proper home—and no person of Car Nicobar who is not a witch-doctor would dare to tread foot in *panam sið* ("the land of the devils," to use the ordinary English translation). Some few departed spirits still maintain the kindly temperament which marked them in this life, and are ready to do service for those who still remain in the land of the living; but most of the spirits begrudge their late "friends" (or comrades—the one word *hol* has both meanings) the blessings which they continue to enjoy, holding with Koheleth that "a living dog is better than a dead lion"; and this begrudging temperament often leads them to do selfish acts which cause their old "friends" to become ill. It is commonly said that the spirit is sick of its homeless condition, it has no house to live in, and that it hopes to frighten away

the spirit from somebody or other, and then to occupy that body itself in this world of ours, and that the struggle which goes on in consequence of this attempt is the cause of sickness. My teacher tells me, however, that such is not the real belief of the people, but that the departed spirit merely selfishly wants his old "friend" (or comrade) to be his companion still in the other world; or it might be that the spirit makes a raid on someone out of utter peevishness.

The spirits of the Nicobarese are not such airy, impalpable beings as "the shades" of some other races. They cannot rest satisfied with the smell of food that is cooked, nor with "the shade" of food which has for their honour and use been burnt or otherwise destroyed. They can still enjoy eating the good substantial hams with yams which their good friends the witch-doctors will often bring them. Some time ago a well-to-do Nicobarese man lost his only son and was naturally much distressed; he spared no expense in all the many funeral feasts which of course followed. After these were over he one day asked the witch-doctor if he had seen his son lately in "the land of the spirits," and the doctor replied that he had had a talk with him only the other day. The father asked how his boy was faring: "Was he happy?" "Oh, he was faring tolerably well; he had nothing much to complain of." When the father asked further if there was anything more that he could do for his son, any gift that he could make him, the doctor replied that the lad indeed had remarked how much he would enjoy eating such pork as he used to get at home, and also he should like



to have some foreign biscuits. So the father at once killed a pig, and put a ham and some yams and plenty of biscuits in a basket for his boy; and gave them to the doctor, who promised to take them immediately into *panam siö* ("the land of spirits") and to give them to the departed lad to eat. Two days after, going to the witch-doctor's house to inquire if his son had relished the food, he espied his own basket up in the store-loft of the witch-doctor's house. He became very angry, and rated the doctor very soundly for being such a cheat and humbug, for he had been deceiving him to get food for himself. The doctor turned on him for his abuse, and solemnly affirmed that he had given both the basket and the food therein to the man's son, that the lad had eaten the food and enjoyed it, whilst that particular basket which the father saw up in the store-loft of the doctor's house was one which had been given to him in *panam siö* by another of the spirits whom he had befriended. In his righteous indignation the doctor refused to bring that basket down so that the father might examine it, and the father went away less credulous than when he came, yet thinking it unwise to provoke the fierce wrath of "the masters" (or "bosses"—*mā*), as the *rö-mi-lūö-nö* (witch-doctors) are often called, for they are dangerous folks to quarrel with.

The occupations of the spirits are not in every respect different from those of us who live in this everyday world, and they too themselves often keep great numbers of fowls and pigs, which they rear from the live animals which their friends send to them by the hand of the witch-doctor. Often, too, the spirits,

as well as the living, will make presents to their good friends the doctors. Every Nicobarese man marks (by cutting) the ears of his own pigs, so that he and others may always tell them, and it has not escaped common notice on the part of the lay-folks that the pigs belonging to the spirits, or at least such pigs as the spirits have given as presents to the witch-doctors, always have very deeply cut marks on their ears—such, indeed, as one would expect the pigs of a thief to bear when the old marks have been cut out.

The spirits will often come back to their old haunts, but they are terrified things, and are easily scared by noises or by a bright light. They often lie hiding by the wayside, under the shade of boughs and leaves, and will pounce upon a man, or throw a stone or piece of half-charred wood at one who has been burning up the refuse in making his new garden; and that man is soon laid low by sickness.

Besides the spirits of the dead there are many other spirits of the ocean and sky, of rocks and trees, but I have never been able to find any way of discriminating exactly the nature of the special spirit that is the cause of any trouble. As by the Chins who live on or near the Aracan Yoma in Burma, so also by the Nicobarese, the spirits which have had a pre-existence as human beings and the spirits which have not are all classed together as one body, though the Chins except from this category the Great Mother of mankind.

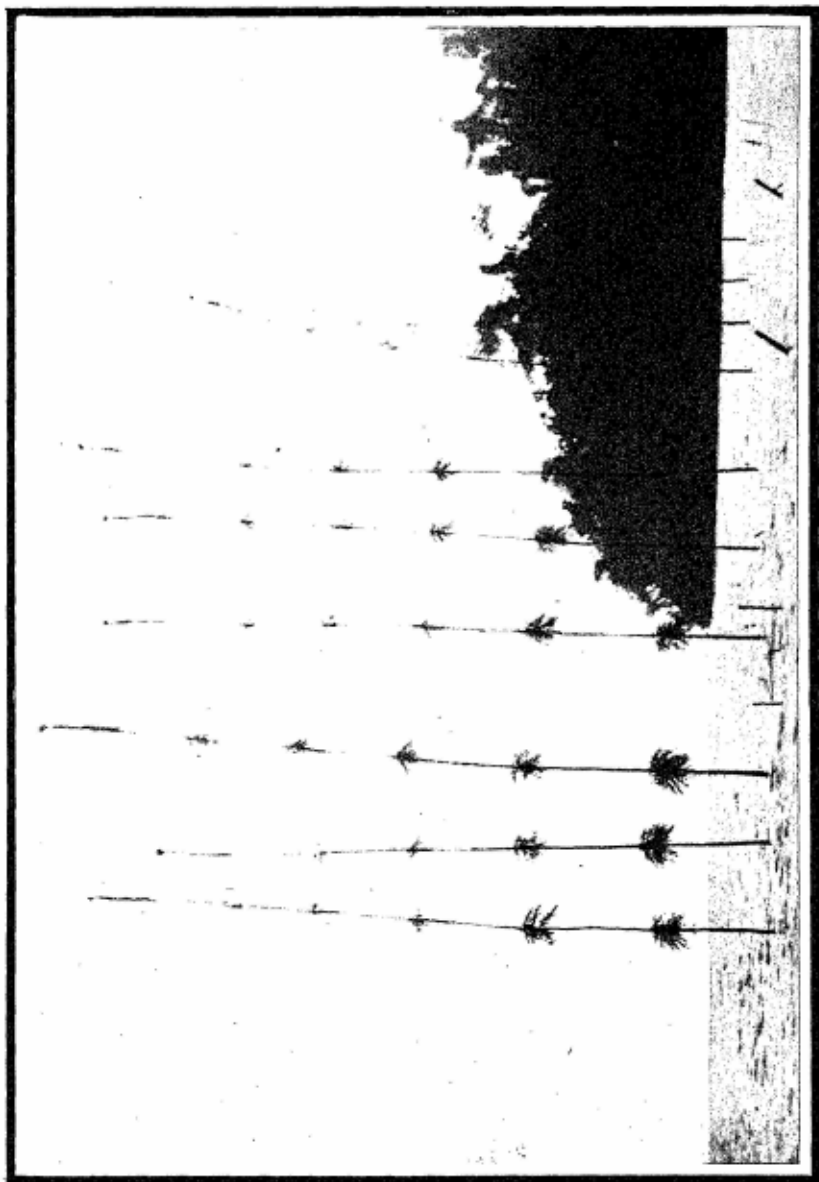
The *tō-mi-lūō-nō* (witch-doctors), who are pre-eminently called *mā* (the masters), are the skilled ones who are supposed to have the knowledge and power whereby they can coax and please, or thwart and check, or

terrify and punish the evil spirits; and as all sicknesses and accidents (beyond the most trivial) are due to the action of malicious or (at the best) of capricious spirits, the *tö-mi-lūö-nö* are the only doctors to whom the sick and their friends may have recourse in their troubles. It is a strange thing that the Nicobarese, who are not an abnormally stupid people, have never made use of herbs, roots or other preparations as real (*i.e.* not magical) medicines; that they have never discovered for themselves the use of an aperient—a real want in their island, at least for such people as partake too freely of the *ripe* coco-nut, of which all are very fond. They will readily take castor oil, or Epsom salts, or any other aperient or other medicines which the Government Agent or one of the mission teachers may give them, but their own minds had never turned to trace cause and consequence *in this kind of way*.

The method of treatment in sickness is well explained in the following translation taken from the Nicobarese:

“The man is sick; he has a pain in his side,” remarks a friend, avoiding as usual any mentioning of the sick man’s name. “He could not sleep all last night, and was very restless, with much pain. He had fever too, yesterday. I will go and see the masters [*i.e.* the witch-doctors], for I want them to come and feel him [possibly including shampooing]. Perhaps he was seized by a spirit when he was out making his garden.”

When the witch-doctors come the friend will suggest: “I suppose you will first extract the injurious substances from his body, and then feel him.” So the sick man, lying on a mat on the floor of the somewhat dark room, is covered with leaves, which the witch-doctors and



SCARE-DEVILS ERECTED ON THE BEACH AT EL-PANAM.

These consist of bamboos, which are daubed with soot and red paint, and to which are tied leaves or bits of cloth; and very immature cocoa-nuts or sour fruits may also be stuck on them.



others collect; and then, after some gesticulation and blowing and emission of ventriloquistic sounds, the witch-doctors will extract those harmful things which the spirits had by magic caused to enter into the body of the sick man, or which had otherwise got into him, and so caused the sickness; and they will triumphantly produce a piece of iron or of charcoal or of stone, or (it may be) a pig's tooth, or a live house-lizard or chameleon.

"Certainly this man here was caught by the evil spirit when he was working at his garden. See these harmful things which have been extracted from his body; especially note that piece of charcoal. This is a piece of the very charcoal made in the fire which the sick man kindled a few days ago to burn up the rubbish where he was working." (It is possible that the spirit objected to his trees being cut down, or his shelter under the leaves being destroyed, but that is not necessary as the reason of his action.)

"So to-morrow," suggests the friend of the patient, "I suppose you will go to the garden to entice back the sick man's spirit."

So the witch-doctors and a number of friends of the patient go to the garden. It is always in the morning or the evening that they go to call back the spirit of the sick man, for it could not bear the midday heat. Every one has in his hand a bunch of leaves of a certain plant (called *iō-ki-teuiny*), and their aim is to capture the spirit of the sick man in the leaves. (These leaves are always required by the witch-doctors. I suppose they have a kind of magnetic power over the spirit, and, as everyone knows, spirits habitually hide among

leaves.) After they have caught the spirit of the sick man they wrap up in *chamam* (the spathe of the giant palm) these leaves together with the spirit, and the *tō-mi-lūō-nō* (witch-doctor) carries them off under his arm. The spirit can be clearly seen by the witch-doctors, although invisible to the eye of the uninitiated.

Sometimes the spirit of the sick person is hidden away by evil spirits, so the witch-doctors have to hunt all round the place. Very likely the sick man's spirit will become terrified and make a bolt for it. The witch-doctors give chase, and do not desist until they have caught the spirit, when all who went out to entice the spirit back, lay-folks and doctors alike, return to the house, still having each a bunch of leaves in his hand.

The people of the house have made preparations and are waiting for them. At the top of the ladder leading up into the house, and on the projecting ends of it, there has been placed a pair of coco-nut shells filled with water, for the purpose of wetting the leaves which they are carrying who have been out for the purpose of enticing back the sick man's spirit. As someone pours a little water over these leaves, on their entering the house, or very soon afterwards, the people who went to bring back the spirit will cry out: "That's enough! Now come along; don't be staying away altogether." After the leaves have had water poured on them they are handed over to the witch-doctor.

All the people in the house then have a little coco-nut oil dabbed on their shoulders. After that someone brings burning embers to burn or singe some feathers

of a fowl. Following him, the witch-doctor goes to the side of the sick man, carrying in his hands all the leaves which have been used in their incantations. These he places up against the wall of the house, not far from the sick man. The leaves used in this sorcery are left there for three days, and then thrown away on the third night.

The following day is one of solemn rest. No one may go far away from his house, for the evil spirits are very angry because the spirit of the sick man has been rescued from their clutches. During the solemn rest-day, too, no work may be done, and no one should make any noise.

The witch-doctors will come again on the third night, often in great numbers, and they, together with the lay-folks, will keep up the song and dance of the *ma-a-fāi* until midnight. They all are wearing garlands made of young banana leaves torn into strips. When they have finished dancing and singing a feast is provided for them.

If the sick person does not feel any better after this ceremony for the rescue of his spirit from the hands of the devils they will now make "scare-devils." In Camorta (Nancowry) there are people who, of wood, will make figures of men, or of crocodiles, or of fish, or of some other object, for the purpose of terrifying and driving away the evil spirits; but we do not use such figures here in Car Nicobar. There whilst the witch-doctor is setting up the figure the assembled lay-folks will take a portion of the fowl which has been sacrificed and dip it into a concoction made by mixing the blood of the fowl with crushed leaves and coco-nut oil, and with this they besmear themselves on the head and




chest; and they cry out, calling to the sick man's spirit to come back.

In Car Nicobar, as we have just said, there are no carved "scare-devils," for the devils here are much less powerful than they are in Nancowry. (*Anglice* : "Car Nicobar is not nearly so pestilentially malarious as are some parts of the neighbourhood of Nancowry Harbour.") Here they use as "scare-devils" palm leaves, small immature coco-nuts, and sticks of *ta-u-ku* (from which the magician's wand is always made) cut into the shape of *dahs* (or choppers). Or still more frequently, and especially in the more public functions, and on the beach at *el-panam*, the "scare-devils" consist of bamboos or other poles, on which are tied coco nut leaves and other leaves. The bamboos will then be erected. All the "scare-devils" will be daubed with soot and red paint, which last is made of a powder which they now buy from the traders and mix with coco-nut oil.

If the patient is no better after the "scare-devils" have been used there is nothing further that can be done (literally, "nothing to be sought out") for the recovery of the sick man. People can only watch by him, and when he is about to die they let all his friends know, and a great number will assemble. They are well aware how often a person sinks off into a sleep or swoon and never awakens again; so in their desire to retain the sick man in the land of the living they are most persistent in their endeavours to rouse the drowsy patient. They will keep showing him things which they think may interest him, especially their treasures of spoons and forks, or they will call him loudly by

name. Thus they prevent the sick man from sleeping, which in some few cases might be the means of saving his life. On one occasion some people came to ask me for smelling-salts for a dying man, with the idea of rousing him up if possible. I went at once to see the man, but much to the disgust of the friends around I could not approve of the proposed treatment.

#### CEREMONIES IN THE TIME OF AN EPIDEMIC

Whenever there is a great deal of sickness in the island they have special ceremonies to banish it. In the "village hall" (as one may call the large "good" house on the beach in *el-panam*) they make "scare-devils" of leaves which are tied on long sticks hung from the walls and fastened thus , and the people sit within the magic square. Some people push or swing it backwards and forwards from behind, and all sing the *ma-a-fāi* songs (which are, at least in theory, religious or magical).

Then they stop the swinging for a short time, whilst the *vō-mi-lūb-nō* (witch-doctors) spear the devils. The devils will squeak and squirm in their fright and pain; and, though they are not visible to the eyes of the uninitiated, the noises they make can be heard by all, though I have known irreverent youths say that they can squeak like the devils if they put a bit of betel leaf in their mouths. Again the swinging of the "scare-devil" is resumed, and this is again followed by the spearing and capture of more devils. Sometimes the doctors call in the lay-folks to help them in their struggles, but there is the difficulty that the lay-folks cannot see the devils. "There he is!" cries the

witch-doctor, and the others come to his help as best they may. At last, after much tossing and rolling over of the doctors and their helpers, and presumably of the evil spirit too, the spirit is captured and secured.

This ceremony will be kept up the whole night.

On this night also many a one who wishes to be rendered immune from the attacks of evil spirits will have his body magically split open, and the obnoxious things like a pig's tooth, a piece of iron, or a live lizard contained in his body will be extracted before they could work any harm. Though the eyes of the uninitiated cannot see all this, and certainly not a drop of blood is shed, yet the things extracted are visible to all and tangible enough. Still there are some who are afraid lest, after their bodies have been thus magically split open, skill might fail the magician to close the body up again in its natural condition, as it failed those who imitated the arts of the great witch of Colchis in ancient classic days.

On this occasion there is no common meal, but during the night each person eats when he feels inclined of the food which he has brought with him from his own house.

In the morning the devils are sent off on rafts with the outgoing tide, and that day is a solemn rest-day.

#### EXORCISM OF SOME EVIL SPIRIT THAT CAUSED AN ACCIDENT

If a person hurts himself by falling from a palm-tree, or if perchance he is bitten by a snake, he must have the evil spirit exorcised; but for this function, strange as it may seem, they wait until the patient has (at least apparently) got well again.

Then all the witch-doctors come, and big bunches of *tö-ki-tuiny* leaves are tied up and hung about the house. The man who has met with the accident must lie down on the floor, under the bunches of leaves, which are frequently swung backwards and forwards over him by any of those assembled.

On this occasion also the witch-doctors are busy all night spearing and capturing the devils, whilst the people sing the *ma-a-fäi* songs; but there is no dancing. The object of the singing is to entice out the evil spirits, which are then speared. At this time, too, the body of the man who met with the accident is split open by the *tö-mi-lüö-nö* (witch-doctor), who uses a magical *dah* (sword or chopper) made of a peculiarly soft, brittle wood. Next day is a solemn rest-day.

## CHAPTER IX

### A VISIT TO CHOWRA

THE greatest events of the year in the ordinary life of the Nicobarese are the visit to Chowra, the *Kun-seū-rō* (which might be very freely translated "Harvest Festival," or the Feast of Pomona), and the *Ka-na-an Ha-un* (or Ossuary Feast), but this last takes place in each village only every two or three years. All these are both religious and social, for to the primitive mind there is no division of affairs into secular and sacred; ceremonial and morals are both regarded as religious, but especially the outward observance. Neither is there any difference between a crime and a sin; it is a thing forbidden, taboo, an abomination. Of religion in its higher sense, of a love and trust of that great and good Invisible Being in whose existence they more or less believe, and of the unselfish desire to do His will, there is very little trace indeed in the life and thought of the Nicobarese. Their practical disregard of the good powers to whose care and oversight by their very observance of *Kun-seū-rō* they do more or less acknowledge themselves to be indebted for at least a good part of the blessings they share in may be compared to the way in which they regard the paternal British Government, which makes them occasional presents, and which keeps the peace in the island, preventing the traders or any other foreigners oppressing them. The Nicobarese would



THE LANDING-PLACE AT CHOWRA ISLAND,

the holy (or unholy) land of the Nicobarese. The Chowrese alone may manufacture the necessary earthenware for the people, and must be employed as brokers when the people of Car Nicobar purchase their big canoes from the Central or Southern Islands.

PART OF A NICOBARESE TU-HET (GROUP OF HOUSES),

showing the *nya-an-ku-pah* in the background.



not like to be without the traders, despite the many inconveniences they bring with them. They are glad that the British Government is here to look after them, and they like to be on easy terms with the Government officials, but they do not want to see too much of them, for they are afraid that the demands made on them might increase, whilst they only want to be protected, and otherwise to be left alone to go on in peace in their own way. So also they hope that the higher powers will duly regulate for their benefit the sun and moon and stars, and the seasons with the wind and rain, so that they may have plenty of food and little sickness; but they trust that they themselves may be allowed to go on in their own ways without any undue interference or interruption or suggestion of change in their manner of life.

So the religion of the Nicobarese, as of most primitive races, practically takes the form of attempts to coax or frighten the many spirits, generally malicious or at best capricious, which beset their path, and so often make trouble for them, especially in the way of causing sickness. The witch-doctors are the wise men who have found out the secrets by which they can compel the spirits to yield to them, and so they are highly revered, out of fear if not out of love. The home of magic in its most powerful form is the holy (or unholy) island of Chowra, some forty miles south of Car Nicobar. The small uninhabited rocky islet of Batti Malv lies half-way in the course, and serves as a beacon to the men who would make the perilous journey to a dangerous land. For the journey



*must* be made in order to buy the sacred cooking pots—quite independent of the fact that there is no telling what might happen if those great magicians, the whole population of Chowra, should ever come to think that the other Nicobarese were disrespectful towards them. More than that, their big growing lads would be deficient some way or other if they were never taken over the seas and introduced to the great “masters”; even as the Burmese say that a boy has only “the name” of a human being until he has been admitted as a novice to the order of Buddhist monks—though he need not remain long in the monastery. It is not, however, necessary for women or girls to cross the seas, any more than it is necessary for them to enter a Buddhist monastery; indeed it is a thing utterly impossible in itself; but then they are “only women.”

So each hot season the people of each village will go once or twice to Chowra, the Car Nicobarese name for which island is now Sa-në-yö. They are of course careful to choose a time when they think that the probability of fine, calm weather is very high. Only canoes purchased through the Chowra people as brokers can go on this trip, for they forbid all other canoes to land there, or, in their own words, “it were sin, according to what the people of Chowra say.”

When the time for starting gets near they singe the canoes with torches of palm leaf in order to harden the wood. The village canoe is sure to be taken on the trip; and there may be one or two other canoes from the village going also. Then they put new cross-bars on the canoe, and fasten them in position with bands made from the leaf of the thorny

palm, which have been split and shaped for the purpose. After this they bring *chamam* (the broad spathe of the giant palm, which is also used for bedding and for making crude boxes, etc.), and sew it on the canoes to cover up the interstices between the canoe proper and the stick that runs along on the top of the cross-bars. By thus making the gunwale a few inches higher they prevent the waves from splashing so easily into the canoe. The outrigger is taken down to the beach, and new bamboos to connect it with the canoe, and all are tied carefully in position, and the masts also.

The people who are going get themselves ready. Some of them have sons who are going for the first time to Chowra; such youths bear the distinctive name of *ra-māl*. They also get ready their goods for barter—cloth, tobacco and *dahs* (or choppers), which they have bought from the traders for this purpose; also yams of various kinds, of their own growing; and they prepare too the food they will require for the trip.

They then sacrifice, by cutting their throats, some cocks, which must have big combs, and they let the blood drip on the heads of the boys who are going for the first time. After this they all feast together in a "good" (*i.e.* ceremonially clean) house on the beach in *el-panam*—normally this would be in the "village hall"; and they eat the flesh of the fowls which have been sacrificed. Then they sing songs in praise of the canoe whilst waiting for the tide to begin to ebb.

They tie to the masts baskets made from *chamam*,

which contain the tobacco and cloth which they take for bartering, and also smaller baskets made from the spathe of the areca-palm—these latter contain their food. On the cane rigging of their craft they tie bamboos (perhaps two feet in length, and an inch and a quarter in diameter); these contain coco-nut oil wherewith to rub their bodies if it is very hot, or if it rains, on the journey.

Then they launch the canoe, and paddle out to beyond where the surf breaks, and anchor there. After this the people swim out to the canoe with their yams, and with the coco-nuts they are taking with them for food and drink during the trip; or, if the big canoe is a long way out, they will take these things in a small canoe, making several journeys. Each man has marked his own yams, which he is taking for purposes of barter; but the nuts which they take to drink are not marked.

All who are going on the trip wear garlands made of the ripped-up young banana leaves, which are plaited; and they also wear round their necks a cord from which hangs a small packet of an odoriferous root something like ginger. The root is wrapped in cloth.

They also have with them in the canoe some sour fruits strung together, as limes, wild oranges, wild brinjals. They say that they take these "as a protection if there should be many great fish"; for they will throw these at the sharks and porpoises which may come around them, and which might so easily upset the canoe, or break the bamboos which keep the outrigger in its place, when the canoe would at once become unmanageable. They believe that the big fish in their

gluttony will swallow whatever is thrown at them, and then on finding that the food they have taken is mighty unpleasant they will go off. The Nicobarese, however, also take with them a few big spears, as a further protection in case that the big fish should prove obstinate and not go away.

The distance is forty miles, and there is often a strong current running. A favourable crossing takes from fifteen to twenty-four hours, but sometimes they are as long as three days on the journey. They generally start in the evening, but sometimes in the very early morning, say between two and four A.M.

When they reach Chowra, the people come down to the shore to meet them, and some of them will come off in small canoes to greet old friends and anticipated customers. The Chowra dialect is probably more different from the Car Nicobarese dialect than the Somerset dialect is from the Lowland Scotch; but the Chowra people generally know a little Car Nicobarese, and some of the Car Nicobarese know something of the Chowra dialect, so they get on tolerably well. At Nancowry in the Central Islands, however, when the Car Nicobarese go down there on business or for pleasure, Hindustani is now the *lingua franca*; it has filled there the place that the English language at one time precariously held.

A house on the beach is placed at the disposal of the visitors, who immediately set about to carry up all their things. Each man sorts out his own goods, and chooses with whom he will transact business—it is generally with his old “friend.” The young lads (*ra-māl*) are duly introduced by their fathers to those

with whom they trade, and the blood of fowls is again rubbed on their bodies, and fowls' eggs are broken on their heads.

If the weather continues good the visitors remain in Chowra for only two or three nights; but if there is a change, and the weather becomes rough or threatening, they are compelled to stay on indefinitely, for the risks in facing even indifferent weather on the ocean in a catamaran (canoe with outrigger) would be very considerable. Despite great professions of mutual friendship, the Car Nicobarese have more dread of the power than respect or love for the character of the people of Chowra, the home of magic. One of their legends is about one of themselves who became panic-stricken through secret dread of what might happen to him at the hands of his Chowra "friends." It runs thus:

"There was once a man of Lapati who got into a terrible fright. [Lapati is a large village on the east coast of Car Nicobar, and is regarded as the first settlement in the island.] The people of Lapati had gone, as they do every year in the hot weather, to Chowra in their canoes, and Chit-töt-röt, for that was his name, had gone along with his neighbours.

"It was only after they had reached Chowra that this man became beside himself for fear, for then he heard that the people of Chowra would sometimes murder their guests [literally, "friends," or companions]. In his panic he got up in the middle of the night, and dragged a little canoe down into the sea, and, himself alone in it, he began to paddle his way to 'the Beacon,' the small island of Batti Malv.

Fortunately the weather was very calm or he would have perished.

“When he got there he left the canoe on the beach and went up into the island, and managed to get himself some food by killing birds by throwing stones at them. These birds he cut open and gutted, and then put them on the stones out in the sun to dry; and when they were thoroughly dried he ate them, for he was not able to make a fire.

“After a few days his friends came that way on their return journey. Fortunately they came quite close to the island in their course. The man beckoned to them and they came in, and he got into the boat with his friends and so got safely home again.”

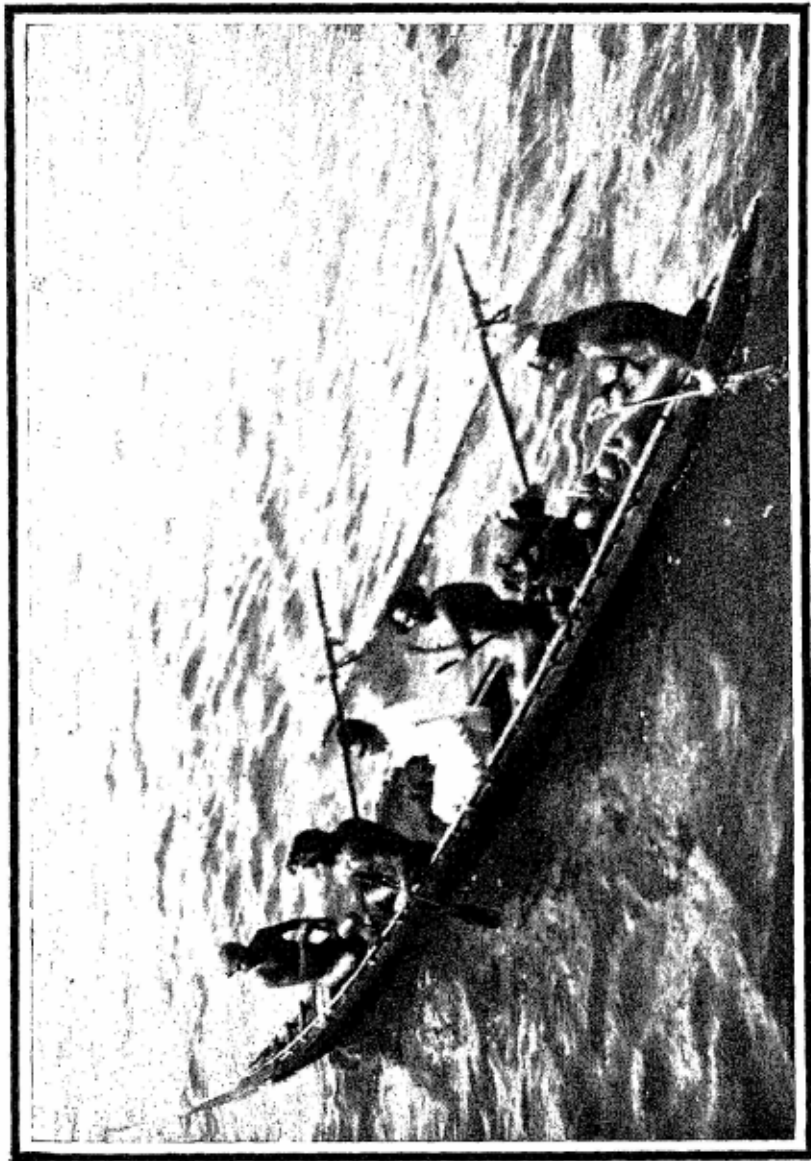
When the people of Car Nicobar want to start back, they get their things together—the pots they have purchased, and the necessary food, and a delicacy called *kui-löi*, as a treat for their friends at home. This is a concoction prepared from grated ripe coconut and bananas, with possibly some yam in it. It has been cooked by steaming, having been placed on some sticks which had been put into a round Chowra pot which had some water below in it.

When they are expected back home, the people of Car Nicobar keep a keen look-out southwards in their canoes, sometimes getting as far away as the southern point of the island, some eight or ten miles distant from Mus. They will take out their long lines for fishing, and will have with them plenty of coco-nuts to drink. They can see the sails of the returning canoes when they are yet a long way off, but will wait for them to come along. If they should

prove to be not from their own village, they will inquire of the people if they have seen anything of their friends out in the open sea.

When the voyagers at last get back to their own village, all the people go down to the beach to meet them. They also heat water for their *al-fresco* bath in *el-panam* (on the beach), and they take down food for them.

For two or three days those who have been upon the trip will remain in *el-panam*; and they will go through the ceremonies of purification—which no doubt were originally intended to free them from all unholy influences of the spirits, both those of Chowra and of their own land, and perhaps also from the spell of the magicians. The children who have now accomplished their first trip to Chowra, and been initiated (as it were) into the company of true men, are decked out, and have silver wire wrapped round their arms and legs, like the *ma-a-fâi* (the novices for the witch-doctorate). Seeds of *pandanus* are also threaded and put on them as necklaces. Young irreverent lads will attempt to snatch away these seeds, but the *ra-mâl* are provided with sticks and with authority to use them on such as would attempt such desecration. Canoe races are held, and these youths have a special part in them, and in the evening, after the races are over, the canoes are "fed" with the blood of pigs and fowls, and with pieces of pork, and with the heads, legs and wings of chickens. Also a number of small pieces of pork are tied up with bands made from the bark of the same kind of plant as that of which the magician's wand is made; these are formed



A SMALL NICOBARESE CANOE, WITH OUTRIGGER.

It has come to barter coco-nuts, betel-nuts, and fruit for bread and cast-off clothing, with the passengers and crew of the R.I.M.S. *Elphinstone*. A large Nicobarese canoe will easily accommodate thirty or more men.





into a kind of garland, and tied round the breast, under the armpits, and over the shoulders of the *ra-māl* (the youths who have now made their first trip to Chowra), and are kept on until the end of the ceremony that night. Finally, just before the company breaks up and the people go to their own homes in the village, these lads again have eggs broken on their heads. Then the great excitement, if not the great pleasure, of the year is over; though some of the *ra-māl* continue to wear the silver wire, and are under certain restrictions until they go again in the following year to Chowra.

## TWO OTHER CUSTOMS

1. *After getting a New Canoe*

“When we, or others in our village, have bought a new canoe, we ought not [or more literally, “it were sin in us,” or “it were an abomination for us”] to eat any ripe fruits other than *pandanus* or coco-nuts, to eat the seeds of the *pandanus*, to eat octopus or bat (whether of the big or little varieties), or to catch fish by poisoning them, or to split up firewood or cane, though it is permitted one to chop or break up firewood. Only after the canoe has made a trip to Chowra, and there has been shown to the people of that place the piece which has been fastened on to the prow here by the people of Car Nicobar, subsequent to its purchase from the people of Chowra—only after that can we do such things, and yet remain void of offence.”

The reason why some of these foods or actions are tabooed is rather quaint. It is feared that bats

might blind people's eyes, and they might not be able to find their way to Chowra. If octopus were eaten, the whole tribe of octopus might attack the canoe when it was out at sea, as is supposed to have happened sometimes in the past; whilst splitting of wood is forbidden lest, on sympathetic principles, the canoe itself should split.

Nowadays, however, it is more customary merely to hold several boat-races, and duly to "feed" the canoes, then after that all further restrictions are generally disregarded.

## 2. *On One's Return from Abroad*

Formerly whenever the people of Car Nicobar went away for a considerable time to any foreign place—it might be in a Burmese sailing vessel to Camorta (or Nancowry), Great Nicobar, or Teressa, to cut and gather nuts—when they got back home there would be ceremonies to entice their spirits back too, lest they should never return from those lands where the men had been working. There would be an offering of pigs, and sometimes of fowls also. Then in the evening, after sunset, the *tō-mi-lūō-nō* (witch-doctors) would come, and for a while all would sing the quasi-religious *ma-a-fāi* songs. Then there would be a feast, and all would partake of the sacrificed pigs and of toddy, for without the liquor the witch-doctors would think any feast a very poor affair.

## CHAPTER X

### WIZARDRY

THE life of the Nicobarese is permeated by a dread of the spirits, which the witch-doctors, and possibly other knowledged people, are supposed to have more or less under their control, though the Nicobarese are a light-hearted people and rarely worry about possible troubles; it is only when they are actually under duress that they pay much attention to suffering and its causes, or even to the doctors to whom they then run for help.

Anything that happens regularly is not supposed to require any cause, or at least one need not trouble about it. What happens only occasionally must have its cause, and the outward and visible circumstances which accompany the event can hardly be more than the instruments in the hands of unseen personalities. One must look beyond the phenomena to the real cause behind them, which in all probability will be found to be one of the innumerable spirits of land and sea and air.

In Car Nicobar there is a very considerable amount of scepticism as to the professed powers of the witch-doctors, who certainly are not the terrible power for evil that they are in some lands. Indeed, though they are pre-eminently called the "masters" (*domini*, not *magistri*), very little attention is paid to them unless their services are technically required. There is, moreover, a general unwillingness to join the brotherhood,

which seems to have no special restrictions, but many perquisites and privileges, especially in the matter of food and drink. Some who have been initiated refuse to practise, and will among their closest friends call it tomfoolery. I have often seen witch-doctors at their business among the Chins of Burma, summoning the spirits of the departed and enrolling them in the hierarchy of the saints, as well as officiating at weddings and funerals; and I believe of these that certainly they might be honest men, themselves believing in their own powers and in their teaching—though they do encourage drunkenness. But I cannot believe it possible that any of the more advanced and intellectual of the Nicobarese witch-doctors *fully* believe in their own claims; and I feel of them, as Cicero did of the Roman augurs, that one wonders how they can pass one another without a smile at their own pretensions.

Only in Car Nicobar is there a novitiate to the witch-doctorate; not in the other islands. This may be due to the assured fact that the men of the northern island are more astute than the other Nicobarese, and so it may have been felt that a raw recruit might very easily give the whole show away. These novices are called *ma-a-fāi*, and give their name to the semi-religious or magical dances or songs which are resorted to in their religious or magical assemblies. To the outsider, and even to the ordinary Nicobarese, there does not seem to be much difference between these and the secular dances and songs, though the *ma-a-fāi* dances and songs are probably more archaic in manner and

style, and may have more references to ancient customs.

Some time ago, when I was making special inquiry, there were two children in Mus village who were *ma-a-fāi*; sometimes there are many, sometimes none at all. Girls and women, as well as men and boys, are admitted as *ma-a-fāi*, and (perhaps) in due time to the full rank of witch-doctor; though the female professors are much less numerous than the males, and I do not remember having heard of any woman who was prominent in the sacred department—*i.e.* of the white art; witches of the black art, however, are known. As a general rule, after about a year's novitiate, they may be promoted to become *ts̄-mi-lūō-nō* (or *ts̄-ta-tong*, as the witch-doctor is sometimes called).

When anyone is of a somewhat sickly nature an attempt is made to get him to become a novice (*ma-a-fāi*). When the people are all asleep in the house at night, the spirits of the departed relatives and friends of the sick man come and throw up into the house, through the open doorway, some medicine (that is to say, leaves such as are used in sorcery); and they will also throw into the house one or two little chickens which have their legs tied. The people in the house are startled out of their sleep by the noise made by the chickens or by the leaves thus thrown up into the room. They get up and light a lamp to see what has happened, and they find the things which have been thrown into the house, and they then know that the spirits are calling the sick man; so he must become a novice. For he must

have intercourse with his departed friends either as a live witch-doctor or as himself also a departed spirit; and he chooses the former alternative.

So they arrange the day; and on that day, in the late afternoon, before sunset, witch-doctors and friends assemble and thump the ground under the man's house with heavy pieces of the stem of the coco-nut leaf, each one at the same time holding in his hand a bunch of *tõ-ki-teuiny* leaves. It will be remembered that the floor of the house rests on posts, and is generally from six to eight feet above the level of the ground. The man to be initiated has been placed in the middle of the house, lying down flat with his face upwards. All the people now go up into the house and spread several full-sized banana leaves, as well as a quantity of *tõ-ki-teuiny* leaves, over the man. On the ridge of the topmost banana leaf they stick the wing feathers of a fowl, and then singe or burn the feathers. After some time the leaves are removed, and out of the leaves there come sundry kinds of small lizards. They have come out of the man's body; they were the cause of his sickness; evil spirits\* had put them there.

Early next morning his friends come and deck him out—the one to be initiated is most commonly a man, but may be a female, and even a child of twelve. All the person's relatives and friends bring what stock of jewellery they have got, and they freely loan it to the man for his term as a novice. It consists mainly of great lengths of silver wire and of two-anna bits. These last are small silver coins of about the size of a

threepenny piece, and have had holes drilled in them in order to string them into necklaces, etc. The women put the silver wire in spiral form on the novice's arms and legs. Sometimes the whole arms and legs are thus encased in wire (silver, or plated, or nickel), or with other anklets and armlets of silver or nickel. Spoons and soup-ladles are also sometimes tied as ornaments round his waist. The men meanwhile make a kind of throne for him, in which he is installed; and a kind of sceptre is given him, and also a magic spear wherewith to slay, or at least to punish, the evil spirits. The *ma-a-fāi* is often afterwards carried about from village to village in his chair, and is always carefully sheltered from the sun.

After a few days more the novice is plunged by the witch-doctors into the land of spirits (*pa-nam sāv*), which lies in the marshy jungle in the middle of the island. Lay-folks may accompany the party for only a part of the way; they may not go with the *tō-mi-lūō-nō* (witch-doctors) into the depths of the jungle, for the departed spirits would be afraid of lay-folks. So these must dance the *ma-a-fāi* dances, strictly remaining all together in one place, whilst the *tō-mi-lūō-nō* show the novice to the spirits. After they have introduced the novice to the spirits they return, bringing with them some fowls which the spirits have given to them.

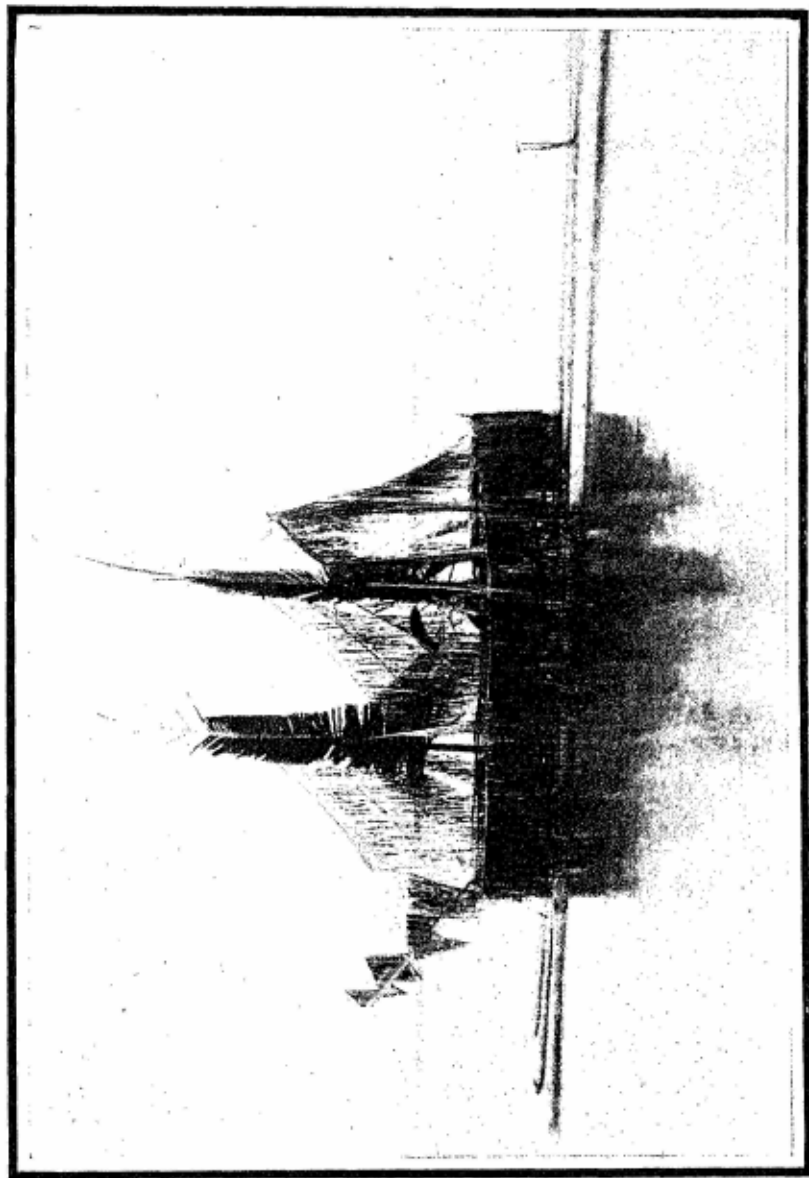
Then they all go to the house of the novice, and after a little rest they again dance the *ma-a-fāi* dance, and sing *ma-a-fāi* songs. After that they all partake of the feast that has been prepared.

The *ma-a-fāi* dance will be held every night, for at least an hour or so, during the whole time of his



novitiate, whether there is a moon or no moon, unless there is mourning in the village, when all dancing is taboo. As the people of their own village might become satiated with the dancing, novices will frequently go to other villages to dance; and wherever they go they are readily supplied with food, and still more liberally supplied with toddy. During their novitiate they may not do any kind of work; it is forbidden that they should even touch a *dah* (or chopper), which the Nicobarese use not only for cutting down their nuts and chopping things generally, but also for the digging up of their yams. His chief occupations are toddy (*tari*) drinking and dancing.

The *ma-a-fāi* always wears the minimum of clothing, apart from his jewellery, as sometimes also do the *ra-māl* (the youths who have been to Chowra on their first trip). He often carries a stick or cane (maybe "a Penang lawyer") which is ornamented with two-anna pieces. This is indeed a kind of badge of office, and is presented to him when he is initiated into the profession. He may remain a *ma-a-fāi* as long as he chooses, and then be advanced to the full rank; or if he chooses he may relinquish his office, and there is a special ceremony for the renunciation. Some there are who have become *ma-a-fāi* simply because they were afraid for their lives through their frequent sickness and the omens; these often relinquish their office as soon as they feel that they are quite well again. All the silver and other decorations which were loaned to the novice on his admission are returned to their owners when he relinquishes the office, or is promoted to be *iv-mi-lūv-nv* (witch-doctor). After a man has been



### A SPIRIT SHIP.

When the witch-doctors capture the evil spirits that cause sickness, they beat and spear and otherwise terrify them. Twice a year there is a great round-up of all these pests to the village, and once in the year, when the prevailing winds are suitable, these evil spirits (having been caged or bound) are placed on board a raft made with sails, etc. as a ship, and are sent off to the unknown distant lands.



admitted a full witch-doctor he may do honest work if he chooses.

Sometimes, but not frequently, the witch-doctors will go for further study of the customs to the holy land of Chowra, or to Nancowry (or more strictly Camorta); but the witch-doctors of Car Nicobar, however ignorant they may be, hold no one as their superiors in their art (or science, is it?); and no one who has been admitted as a witch-doctor in any other island is regarded by them as other than a layman, and is only received by them as a brother after he has first been admitted as a novice, and then in due time promoted to be *ið-mi-lūð-nð*. I was not able to get any particulars of the special ceremony by which the novices are promoted to the full doctorate. Among their stock-in-trade, besides their magic swords and wands, the witch-doctors have tridents sometimes eight feet long, made in Chowra from very thin imported iron; and often they have a few old bayonets and imitation rifles (if they cannot procure some old broken ones). When they are engaged in professional work they often wear a minimum of clothing, but they frequently wear a top-hat.

#### DRIVING THE EVIL SPIRITS OUT OF A VILLAGE

Once in the south-west monsoon, and once in the north-east monsoon, there is a general driving out of the devils from a village. The people of Lapati (a large village on the east coast, said to be the first settlement in the island, and which has therefore a kind of precedence among the villages) send to those here, at the villages of Mus and Kinmai, as they do at the

festival of *Kun-señ-rö* (a kind of quasi-Harvest Festival), to tell them the date they have fixed upon themselves for the great exorcism of the devils.

The men then go and cut in the jungle some bamboos, which they bring to the beach to *el-panam*, together with leaves of the thorny palm and of the young sprouting coco-palm, and also some leaves of a kind of tree that bears nuts which resemble the areca-nut. The bamboos are decorated with bunches of leaves which are tied on to them. An imitation *dah* (or sword) is made of the light, brittle wood which the magicians always use for the flogging of the spirits and other magical purposes. This is also tied on to a bamboo; and all the things are daubed with soot and red paint. In the evening the bamboos are erected on the beach in *el-panam*, and after sunset all the people assemble in the "village hall" (the big "good"—i.e. ceremonially clean—house in *el-panam*), and they all sing *ma-a-fäi* songs, and the witch-doctors spear the devils. Whilst this last performance is going on the lights must be turned down (or, more exactly, they must be shrouded over with *chamam*, the spathe of the giant palm), for the devils are afraid to come out, despite the charm of the singing, if there are many lights about; so perforce the lights must be covered over. The witch-doctors will then spear the evil spirits with their magic spears, and when they have got hold of one in their hands the lay-folks will come forward to help them in their struggles. They try to get the evil spirit down on the floor, when they will jump upon him and shout in triumph.

I have been told that once when in his youth my

old friend Offandi was ill, and the witch-doctors came to exorcise the evil spirit, there was such rejoicing over and jumping upon the evil spirit that friend Offandi in his own person suffered greatly, and was nearly killed by the jumping, in addition to having suffered acutely whilst the devil was being beaten with the rope's end. Perhaps this experience was the cause, *fons et origo*, of his later scepticism.

The devils squeak and squirm when they are getting speared, making a noise very similar to what children make when drawing in their breath if they have in their mouths a leaf of betel, or some other suitable leaf. This performance of catching, beating and spearing the devils is carried on for three nights in succession.

After the first night's performance some forty or fifty people will come from Lapati to Mus village in the latter part of the afternoon, and they will take their part in the ceremony by beating gently with sticks the bamboos and leaves that have been erected on the beach as "scare-devils." By their strange ideas, at least under certain circumstances, a gentle blow gives much more pain to an evil spirit than a hard blow would; and the most brittle kind of wood is more effective for flogging the spirits or for cleaving the earth than an iron rod or the sharpest sword could be. The visitors will also join the villagers in singing their devil-scaring incantations in the "village hall"; but there is no dancing on this occasion. Afterwards the visitors will all be feasted severally by their friends in Mus, and after their evening dinner they will go home.

The following afternoon a number of people of Mus will make the return visit, and go to Lapati village, and will in like manner help them in this great exorcism.

On the third day—that is, after there have already been long performances for three nights—the witch-doctors, with a great crowd following, will go round the village to all the groups of houses, and will flog and spear and catch the devils in every house. Afterwards they spear the devils on the beach in *el-panam*, not only again in the “village hall,” but this time they also go into the “unclean” birth-huts and dead-houses, where naturally are the fiercest devils of all.

After the struggle with the devils is over, and these are all safely bound with a kind of bitter-tasted creeper that is plentiful in the island, they are thrown into the sea. But when the wind is suitable for the purpose—that is, during the south-west monsoon for the eastern villages—the people make a raft, and the witch-doctors put the devils on it. Still it is not well to depend entirely on fate, or on the good-will of the sea and the out-going tide to bear the devils far away, so the good spirit of one of their departed friends, in whom is still the milk of human kindness, or some other good spirit who is willing to be a benefactor of the human race, has been brought by the witch-doctors from “the land of spirits” in the interior of the island, and he is carried down to the beach and placed in charge of the raft and its passengers. This good spirit is visible to the eyes of all beholders, but to the uninitiated he might seem to be a fairly well-made doll of leaves about four feet in height. It is

strange how often we do not see things as they are! But "things are not what they seem."

The raft has sails of palm leaves; and torches of palm leaf have been made and tied on to it, and will be lighted at night, after it has been launched. Laymen will then tow out the raft beyond the reef of rocks and on beyond where the surf breaks—they generally swim out to do this. Whilst they are engaged in this doubly dangerous task every one of them keeps hold of some *to-ki-teuiny* leaves in his hand, as a protection against the evil spirits. After this all the people will watch with relief and pleasure the raft being slowly borne away by tide and breeze.

They say, though none but the witch-doctors have ever seen it, that the good spirits start off for Chowra at the same time, paddling their own canoes, but these will return the following night. Some of the more travelled Nicobarese say that the evil spirits are taken away to the barren volcanic mountain island of Narcondam, which lies midway between Port Blair and Burma. So they will be surely far enough away, and there can be little chance of their ever finding their way back to trouble the good people of Car Nicobar.

Then the bamboos which with their leaf decoration served as "scare-devils" will be pulled up and taken down to the water's edge. The devils that still remain in hiding are speared; for the host of evil spirits is innumerable, and one can never hope to be absolutely free from their annoyance. The leaves and other things tied on to the bamboos are stripped off and cast into the sea, whilst the bamboos themselves are returned to the owners who loaned them for the purpose—



for bamboos are very scarce in Car Nicobar, and often have to be imported from Burma.

After that the witch-doctors rest a bit, and then go up into the "village hall," where they refresh themselves with toddy, and after that with tobacco or betel-nut; and in due course there follows a substantial meal.

Then the witch-doctors go outside alone—it is quite dark now—and they throw up two or three magic swords into the air, where the spirits dwell; for the Nicobarese spirits, in this matter at least, fare better than the shades of the ancients who dwelt in the underworld. Yet the idea of an underworld as a possible place for beings to dwell in has occurred to the Car Nicobarese mind, as is seen in their folk-tale of the pixies (No. IV., p. 242). These magic swords which are thrown up into the air are the same instruments that they use in the painless vivisection of a man to extract from his body the harmful substances which evil spirits and evil men have by magic injected into him.

Then there follows a solemn rest for three days, when no one may travel or move about, and least of all go to his garden or elsewhere in the jungle, or dire disaster may befall him, as their folk-tales tell (see *Folk-Tale*, No. XV., p. 258). No one may shout or make any noise; not even may they call their pigs home in the usual way. The utmost that can be allowed is that they may cut down a few nuts from trees close by, as quietly as is possible, for immediate use, and that in the evening, shortly before sunset, they may gently call their pigs home for their food—the pigs are not ordinarily shut up for the night. Thus the people,

assembled in large numbers in the "village hall," await the descent to the earth again of the magic swords.

If the people are disobedient, and do not rest and keep the ancient customs, the swords will fall the sooner—say in the night following the one in which they were thrown up into the air—for the spirits are angry. After three nights the swords will descend, if they have not done so before, and the witch-doctors will pick them up in the morning.

The vision of the witch-doctors is, as we have seen, remarkably good, and in these rest-days they will occasionally see a ship full of ghosts come sailing along in the air. I suppose these are the good spirits coming back from Chowra by another route. At any rate the good spirits which have been in their canoes to Chowra have now got back again, and the people make preparations to feed them, and go into the jungle for yams and other needful things. They kill a number of pigs and fowls, and cook lots of yams; and there is always plenty of toddy (*tari*). Some people will also tie up live pigs and fowls, and bring cloth and silver (wire, or rupees, or two-anna bits), as the witch-doctors give directions; for they tell them that their departed friends frequently ask for such things. These are handed over to the witch-doctors to take to the land of spirits to give to them. Out of gratitude to their good friends the witch-doctors who see to their needs, the ghosts will often in return make presents of pigs and fowls and other things of which they may happen to have a superabundance at the time. The impious will often note that such pigs as the spirits give to the witch-doctors have had their ears recently cut,

as if the marks of some previous owner were thus obliterated.

This general feeding of the spirits of the departed, like the sending out of the evil spirits on the raft, takes place only once a year; on the east coast this is at the "devil-drive" which takes place in the south-west monsoon.

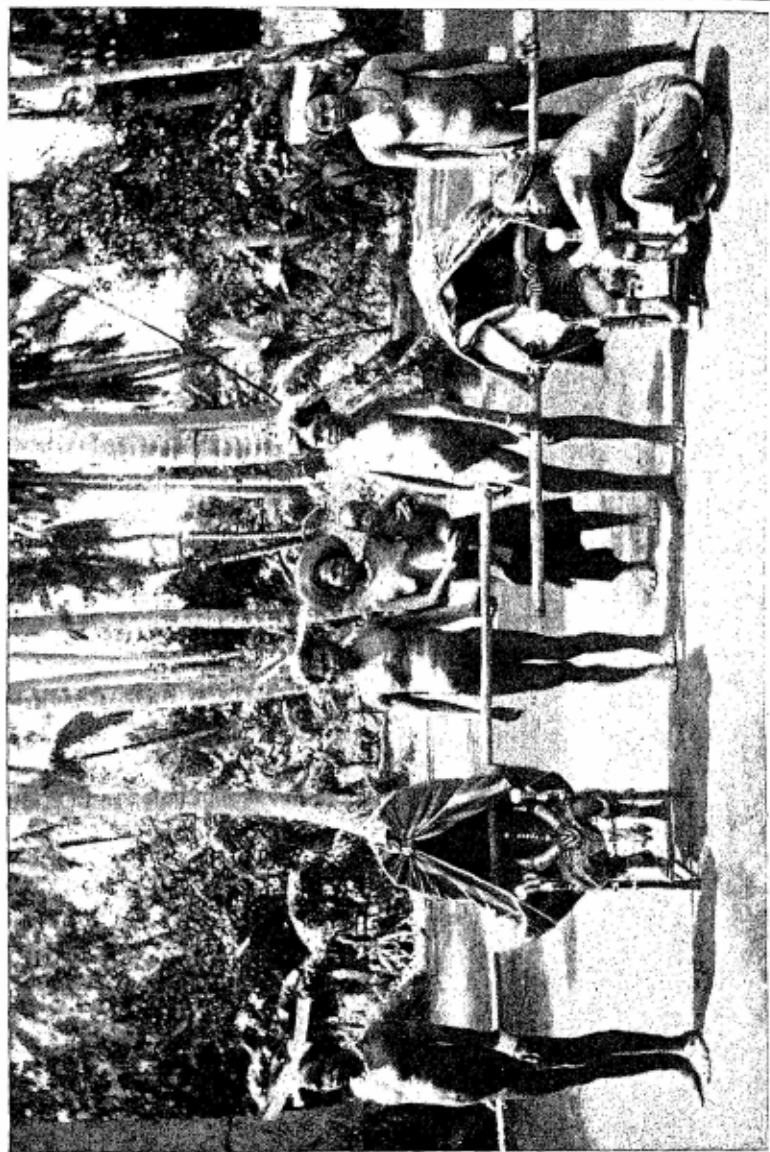
#### EXORCISM FOR ASSUAGING THE ELEMENTS

If there is a violent storm on the land, and the rain never ceases, and the wind is strong, and palms and other trees are uprooted, and there is much thunder and lightning, they will summon the witch-doctors to cause by their charms all this to cease.

Under the directions of the witch-doctors the people will bring a long bamboo and certain leaves of trees. Then they will tie these leaves and some palm leaves to the bamboo; and on the thin end of the bamboo they will stick wild brinjals (the fruit of the egg plant) and wild oranges, running the bamboo through them.

The decorated bamboo is then erected on the beach in *el-panam*, and the witch-doctors get themselves ready to assuage the elements, by preparing the leaves and other charms they require.

Then they all, witch-doctors and lay-folk, go along the foreshore, carrying with them the leaves and other things required; and they throw wild brinjals, wild oranges and limes into the sea. When they come to any place where the waves have broken the rocks, or where a very big bough has been broken off from a tree, they will offer a propitiation to the rocks or tree, driving sticks into the ground, and, splitting these at



TWO NOVICES FOR THE WITCH-DOCTORATE.  
Prospective seers and medicine-men with their attendants.



the top, they will place in the split stick some leaves and some pieces of ripe coco-nut which have been previously singed by torches of palm leaves. The husks of these nuts have been thrown away.

The witch-doctors by themselves, without the company of the lay-folks, will also go round to look at the big trees in the "forbidden ground" (the land of spirits), and if they find there any very big branches broken off, or trees uprooted, they will make the like propitiation.

When the storm ceases, the bamboo which had been erected on the beach as a "scare-devil" or charm is taken down, and a feast is provided for the witch-doctors. They will also sing the *ma-a-fāi* songs; but they have no dancing on this occasion.

On the beach in *el-panam* at Mus village there is a very ordinary-looking small piece of coral rock, whence (it is believed) the thunder proceeds in storms. The people will place palm leaves upon it to cause it to thunder and the longed-for rain to come. I have been told that there are many such rocks in different parts of the island. Banana skins, or any other form of rubbish, may not be thrown down on such rocks.

## CHAPTER XI

### "DEVIL-MURDER"

AS we have seen, the Nicobarese live in a world of magic, where things are wrought by other means than such as our Western science wots of; and the wise men who understand somewhat of the working of the unseen world, and are more or less able to rule the evil spirits, are much in demand when anything evil befalls one. The whole problem of evil is very difficult, and despite his utmost care no one can be guaranteed against suffering. Certain actions at all times, and other actions at certain times, are bound to work out woe, quite independent of the intention or mind of the doer. Hence certain kinds of food are forbidden, especially to pregnant women and their husbands, and to small children. Despite the opinion of some great scholars, it would seem that (speaking generally) the original cause of their becoming taboo was the fact that disaster was sometimes perceived to follow such acts; *post hoc*, and in some cases really *propter hoc*. And when once the principle was established that in certain cases certain actions are "an abomination," or "a sin," the practice of regarding things as taboo would grow by the force of its own weight.

Many foods are forbidden to those who are ceremonially unclean in consequence of their duties with respect to the corpses of their dead; also they may

not touch their own food with their fingers; whilst other things are forbidden to all the living, whether for a season or altogether, out of consideration for the dead—whether the motive that inspires the taboo be selfish or unselfish. On one occasion a very fine iguana, two or three feet in length, was caught by the school children, and I supposed they were going to have a feed, for they are fond of iguana flesh, and it is only rarely that they have the chance of eating it. Afterwards to my astonishment I found that it had been simply cast out as refuse, after an elderly woman and others had talked over the matter. It was not thought that the reptile was diseased, or anything of that sort, and the only explanation I could get was: “We are not eating [= “We do not want to eat”] iguana flesh on this occasion; on some other occasion, if we should have the chance, we should eat it.” No doubt it had been considered that the omens were not favourable for their eating the flesh, so they threw it away in the jungle, where the pigs or dogs would soon find it, and revel in eating it, whilst they themselves made their dinner of plain boiled rice with salt or ripe coco-nut as a relish.

Sometimes individuals, chiefly women between forty and fifty years of age, have a spell of private taboo. They will not eat any food which has been cooked by anyone but themselves; and they will not eat pork or chicken, nor drink water, under any circumstances. More than that, they are not ready to cook food for themselves, and often get much reduced in health and strength. The original cause of such habits seems to be a kind of hysteria. Such persons are termed *sa-òk-kūō*.



Besides the lawful practice of magic, in order to bring good to oneself or others, there is also the unholy practice of the black art, the purpose of which is to bring misery and death to someone, or the loss of his possessions. To make matters worse, an honest man may by mere forgetfulness or stupidity do something which is sure to work woe.

I had not been long in the island, and was on my first visit round it as officiating Government Agent, when at Sawi village I heard a very strange story from Uiharam (whose name means, “Do not comfort him”), which seemed to me to be a clear sign of the gross oppression of the natives by the foreign traders. I mistrusted my translator for some time, though one of the Nicobarese there, by name “Mr Crow,” a very talkative man who had his own special plaint, was able to interject in English his remarks on the case, which really stood as my interpreter had told me.

It appeared that a Mohammedan trader named Zachariah, a native of the Maldiv Islands, who had for many years been residing at Passa, an outlying hamlet of Sawi, had taken three pigs from Uiharam in order to show that they were good friends; that at first he had demanded five pigs, but that Uiharam had said that he should never have them; and that, without Uiharam’s consent, he had taken three pigs “to show that we were very good friends.”

I was naturally much puzzled, and wanted to know how it could be any sign of friendship towards a man to take three of his pigs. So they rehearsed to me the whole story. Uiharam and another person were both building houses for themselves at the little trading

settlement of Passa. The other man got on very fast with his house, but Uiharam had a bad finger due to dirt getting into a wound, and it had festered, and so his work was at a standstill for a few months. Several times over Zachariah remarked in a friendly sort of way to Uiharam that he was not getting on with the building of his house like his neighbour was, and each time Uiharam lifted up his hand, and replied: “ How can I build a house when I have got a finger like this ? ” Yet again the same remark was made by Zachariah, and again Uiharam replied as before, only this time he said further to Zachariah: “ I do not know what has happened to my finger ; perhaps you have bitten it. ” For his saying this, three pigs of Uiharam were taken, to show that he and Zachariah were good friends.

The officiating Government Agent was puzzled, and thought how frightful must be the servitude of the poor natives when no one looked upon the case as one of dire oppression, though it might be a case of “ hard laws ” ; so he wrote out a notice for Zachariah ordering him to appear before him next morning at sunrise, for it was now near sunset, and the place where he lived was a mile or two away.

Within two hours, however, the man turned up with sundry of his friends, both Indian and Nicobarese. Zachariah said that the story as I had heard it was substantially true, only that he as a Moslem had nothing to do with pigs, and that the fine was not levied by him but by the *kam-hô-ka* (or *panchayet*—*i.e.* the council of elders) ; and, further, that the pigs were to be divided up, and that a portion was sent to each house. When I asked, “ But why should

the man be fined at all?" again the answer came, "To show that we were good friends."

I then inquired of the complainant if the fine had been levied by the regular lawful assembly, according to the customs of the Nicobarese. I found that it could not possibly be so, for women were present taking part in the assembly, and also one Indian. I was also informed that only one of the pigs had been killed and divided up, a portion being sent to each house with the intimation that Uiharam and Zachariah were good friends; the other two pigs Zachariah's Nicobarese wife had still got. Uiharam acknowledged getting and eating his share of the pork, just like the rest.

Then it suddenly dawned on me what the meaning of the whole affair was. Uiharam's finger was taking bad ways; it had been bad for weeks, and was festering, and might possibly kill him—as Westerns would say, through blood-poisoning or gangrene. But if indeed Uiharam's death should follow, the Nicobarese would know very well that the cause of death was that Zachariah had by magic bitten his finger, as Uiharam had himself plainly hinted. In such a case Zachariah ought judicially to be killed by the community as one possessed of a devil, and who had by magic murdered Uiharam. So to testify that Uiharam meant nothing by his casual remark, which he wished to be forgotten by everyone, and to assure the community that despite his hasty words he and Zachariah were very good friends, the pig was killed and eaten, and everyone's mind set at ease.

But Uiharam's mind was not set at ease. He had

said most determinedly at the beginning, when they talked of taking five of his pigs, that five should never be taken whilst he had strength to resist, and he was not satisfied now that three had been taken; but when the Agent delivered the Solomonic judgment that as one pig had been killed and eaten, it could not be restored, but that the other two should be returned on the morrow at the rising of the sun, everyone went away happy, on good terms with his neighbours.

The next case was a complaint by “Mr Crow” that he had been fined one pig some months before for saying of a certain trader that “he cut a pretty figure” when he was out in a canoe just after sunset trying to catch fish. I found, however, that the matter had been up before my predecessor in office, and so I did not go into the case. I told “Mr Crow” that I could not revoke what my predecessor had done, but that if he chose he was perfectly at liberty to appeal to the Magistrate on his next visit. I never heard anything more about the matter.

Another case for judgment. A Nicobarese woman named Kufông, some thirty years of age, who was in Burmese dress, and spoke Burmese fairly well, was charged before me for having by threat of practising magic on them compelled a number of men of Lapati to go to Kemnyus village to erect a shop for one of the traders there. It was not that the trader did not pay them sufficiently for their work, but that the men did not want to go to do that work, or at the least they did not want to go at that time. They had never agreed to go, but they went and did the work because they knew (or at least suspected) that Kufông

practised the black art, and that misfortune would befall them if they did not do what she told them to do.

The headmen of Lapati, too, are afraid that they will get into trouble with the Government if Kufông is allowed to stay in their village, as it is certain she will be “devil-murdered” sooner or later. Further, it was only by the intervention of the late Government Agent that she had not been killed a year and a half ago.

I found out that Kufông, who was a native of Kenyuaka village, had been for five years mistress to a Burmese trader who had now returned to Maulmain. Kufông was, however, still maintained by the firm, as she was found useful. As mistress to a Burman she regarded herself as half Burmese, and, like the Burmese, she paid a good bit of attention to her dress and to her toilet. Like Burmese women, she used a long tail of hair, probably formed from the combings of her own head, which would skilfully be set in the middle of the growing natural hair. One day she was having special ablutions, and the tail of hair had been put out on a bush to sweeten in the sun. Two little children came along, and found this tail of hair. They played with it for a while, and then, dropping it on the ground, went on to play with something else. It is not little children only who act like this; the Nicobarese people will leave their clothes or tools lying about anywhere, as well as toys and playthings. Sometimes in the early mornings in the cold weather the children would find it chilly before sunrise, and would take their thin blankets

as shawls to wrap round them when they went out. In the evening they would find their blankets missing, because they had thrown them off soon after the sun rose, when they were somewhere about in the plantation or in the jungle or on the beach, they did not know where they had left them.

Now it happened that when the children were still playing about a pig came along, and finding the tail of hair lying on the ground began to munch it up. Just at that moment Kufong turned round and spied the pig eating her hair. She made a murderous rush for the pig, which had not much difficulty in getting out of her way; and then realizing that the two children must have been playing with the tail and left it on the ground—for she had carefully placed it out of the reach of the pigs—she rushed at them and gave them a merciless thrashing. I do not know that there was any suspicion that the children were really seriously injured by the beating she gave them, but there could be no doubt at all that a woman who could so beat little children must be possessed of a devil, and ought to be got rid of. With some difficulty the Agent had persuaded the people that this was only the manifestation of a vile temper, under sudden and somewhat serious provocation. At length the people expressed themselves willing to accept this interpretation; a present was given, and peace was made.

Despite all the warning Kufong had received, she is found trading upon her reputation as a witch—extremely dangerous as such reputation was—and now the old case is opened up again. I order her to leave Lapati at once and return to her native village. I also tell her that if I have not a good report of her conduct when I reach

her village on my next tour of the island I shall bring her case before the Magistrate.

This time she was cowed. On my next visit to her village I found that she was on her good behaviour, and after that her name never came before me in any capacity whatsoever.

It was not for many years after the British had been in possession of Car Nicobar that they learnt that nearly every year two or three atrocious murders were committed by this peaceable and apparently inoffensive people; and, strange to say, no one seemed to be aggrieved or to feel that anything awful had happened. So the Deputy Superintendent of the Andaman Islands was told off for special investigation into this matter. It proved a much easier task than had been anticipated, for when those whom popular report credited with the murders were brought before the Magistrate, they gave their evidence in a straightforward manner, telling him how and why they killed the man (or woman, as the case might be), and who were their accomplices. They could not understand how the Government could regard them as criminals; they had merely been doing an unpleasant duty in ridding the world of monsters (“bad people”) whose own conduct had destroyed whatever right they might once have had to live in it. Those people were all under the influence of the devils, and had in most cases been secretly condemned to death in the lawful assembly of the elders (*kam-ho-ka*).

It was impossible to regard such men as ordinary murderers; and at the same time the Government could not permit any private congregation, or even the time-honoured assembly of a village, to pass and carry out

the death sentence. So those who had actually taken part in the murders were taken off for a season to Port Blair, the great penal settlement of India, though they were not put along with the other convicts. Their friends were told that such “devil-murders” must never occur again, or, if they did, the people who committed them might themselves be put to death. They had not understood matters before; so those who were now being taken off would be restored to them as soon as it was thought that they had learnt their lesson.

When the Nicobarese elders protested that life would be impossible if the “bad” people were not thus disposed of, the Magistrate told them that if they had anyone in their villages who would not be “good,” the elders should duly correct him, as they have ever been in the habit of doing, by word or by a whipping—without, however, breaking any bones, or doing the man any permanent injury. If the man persisted still in his bad ways, they should bring him with all the witnesses before the Magistrate, who would himself try the case; and if the Magistrate found the man guilty he would carry him off for imprisonment at Port Blair. The headmen replied that if the Government would take their “bad” men away from the island, and keep them away, they would be very well satisfied, and give up “devil-murdering” anyone, for they had no love for such work.

The *Census of India Report* of 1901, vol. iii., “The Andaman and Nicobar Islands,” gives a report of the cases, with a *résumé* of the depositions made



in the court, whether held in Port Blair or on Car Nicobar.

When I first went to the island in 1912 I was told that there had been no known case of “devil-murder” for more than ten years, the last case taking place in the remote western village of Arong. A few years ago, however, there were two other cases in the same neighbourhood; and there may have been others. In all these latter cases, though the murderers may have felt themselves morally innocent—more especially as the British Government is apt to pay no attention when the charge of sorcery is made against anyone—there had been no recognized trial and conviction of the murdered man—not even in a *secret* assembly of the elders. Furthermore, the inspirers of the murder in these recent cases employed other persons to carry it out—though, indeed, it was normally the elders who gave the decision, and the younger men who carried out the execution.

In the olden days—that is, up to a little more than twenty years ago—these “devil-murders” were, in the main, honestly purposed judicial executions. This was the only way open to them by which they could rid themselves of the “bad” men and of very evil spirits by which the men were possessed. The unnecessary violence used was probably resorted to in order to impress duly the evil spirit with what he might expect if he ever came near the place again; for, by all the principles of homœopathy, the devil that possesses a man must suffer when the man himself is made to suffer.

The offences for which this judicial execution was

inflicted seem to have been fourfold: (1) persistent theft (after public rebuke, and for a second offence flogging); (2) sorcery or the black art (whereby the lives of others were taken, or at least imperilled); (3) murder or violent assault; and (4) being a public danger to the life or property of the community. Under this last charge would come such persons as were found guilty of arson, or who put people in fear of their lives by threatening or otherwise. It was not possible to imagine that any of these offences could be committed by people who were not devil-controlled, and therefore they must be exterminated. Amongst those killed were sometimes *tō-mi-lūō-nō* (witch-doctors) who had failed to cure the sick, and who were probably supposed to have wilfully caused the death of their patient by foul use of their art.

A meeting of the elders (*kam-hō-ka*—in India called a *panchayet*) would be held more than once to discuss some “bad” man’s conduct; for they are fond of quiet discussion in their own way, and have a special word in their language which signifies “to have the old matter up again in the assembly.” After mature consideration, when they had come to the conclusion that there was no hope of the man’s redemption, the elders would give the word to the young men that such a person was to be done away with.

Then a number of the young men would quietly gather round the more or less unsuspecting victim when he was resting inside one of the houses. They would beat him insensible with sticks, and then throw him through the doorway down on the ground below. With loud cries of exultation, they would tear his

arms and legs out of their sockets, and would break the bones. Then they would truss and tie him up, and take him out to sea, some two miles from the shore, and throw the body into the water. After that they would return, feeling that they had done a work of merit, and that neither that devil nor that man would be likely to trouble the community again.

By the kind permission of Sir Richard Temple we quote from a lecture of his, recorded in the *Journal of the Society of Arts* (of 22nd Dec. 1899), a passage dealing with “ Devil-Murder.” The police, landed for this special purpose in the previous week, had, with the assistance of the Nicobarese generally, arrested Hika and Kinki, men belonging to good Nicobarese families; and these men were brought before E. H. Man, Esq., C.I.E., Deputy Superintendent of the islands, on the charge of murder. Sir Richard writes:

“ It appears that it was decided in village council at Lapati, strongly suspected to have been under the presidency of the headman thereof, that one Lowi was a thief, who did not live in the regular way. In fact he was a bad man and had a ‘ devil,’ and so he was a danger to the community. Now when a man has a ‘ devil,’ there is only one thing to be done with him; he must be killed in the orthodox manner and his body put into a boat and cast into the sea. The orthodox manner is to break the limbs and then the neck. On this occasion the executioners were the prisoners, acting on the public behalf. Their behaviour on trial is characteristic. A witness is describing the scene when Hika calls out: ‘ Not

same like that! I take his head so. Make go back and his neck break!’ Says Kinki to the Judge, disgusted with the length of the proceedings: ‘Say, Man, this very long. Give us cheroot.’

“It is quite impossible to get anything but a dim glimmer of a notion of wrongdoing in what was done into the heads of Hika and Kinki, or of any other Nicobarese for that matter. So they are detained in Port Blair until thoroughly home-sick and cowed, and until the relatives even of the murdered man beg for their return. They are then finally landed back again in full convict uniform, of which they are quite proud; and well they might be, for they are for a time among the best-dressed people on the island. It is quite odd to watch the air of unconcern and accustomed possession with which a Nicobarese released prisoner will shoulder his bundle and march off home on landing on his native shore. I may say that the Nicobarese dread dying away from home more than anything else, and so detention at the Andamans has real terrors for them; and by dint of arresting and detaining for a time every perpetrator of a customary murder, this peculiar sort of lynch law is being steadily put down.”

## CHAPTER XII

### KUN-SEU-RÖ: THE SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING

A CYNIC has remarked that gratitude is not really a lively remembrance of favours received, but rather a lively expectation of favours to come. Certainly, at least in the child-like temperament, both these elements are generally found coexisting in the same person. Still, amid all the magical ceremonies and devices which this primitive people resort to in order to stave off the disasters and miseries which unseen powers are supposed to be in the habit of inflicting on poor mortals, it is a relief to find that the Nicobarese have also one ceremony, and that a great one, though (like Christmas) only coming once a year, in which they devote themselves to a service of thanksgiving to all the unseen and unknown powers who have been all along ministering to their welfare, sending the sunshine and the rain, giving increase to their pigs and fowls on the land and to the fish in the sea, causing the ground to yield nuts and yams and *pandanus* and many other kinds of fruit, "filling their hearts with food and gladness." One does not wish to investigate matters too narrowly in the desire to find out whether gratitude for the favours of the past or expectation as to the future is the more compelling force which moves the whole land at this festival, or whether, indeed, it is merely a custom to which they are especially attached, connected as it is

with the special food which is cooked at this time alone—even as turkey and plum-pudding and mince-pies and dances and entertainments are sometimes the things about which some Westerners chiefly think at Christmas.

At this feast of thanksgiving, this "Harvest Festival" as we might call it, there is no worship beyond the instinctive feeling of reverence, and what is expressed in the offerings made to the good spirits of the place and to the canoes. It is, however, the noblest element in the Nicobarese religion that I have been able to trace, though it would come under the condemnation of the old prophet Habakkuk: "He sacrificeth unto his net, and burneth incense unto his drag; because by them his portion is fat, and his meat plenteous" (i. 16).

The witch-doctors and the novices have no official connection with this great feast, or with anything that is good; they take part in it as inhabitants of the village, but are quite in the background.

The festival is always held after the south-west monsoon has definitely set in and the rains are well begun—that is, generally, in the month of June. The Nicobarese have no names for the months, any more than they have for the days of the week, and probably many of them could not tell one how many months there are in a year, or whether one year may not be a good bit longer than another year. The week, being an artificial division of time (originally the quarter of a lunar month of some twenty-nine days), was unknown to the Nicobarese, but of course the month and the year are known to all who have

emerged out of the infancy of the individual or the race. The Nicobarese also have names for the two monsoons (the north-east and the south-west), which are counted as lasting six months each. They also sometimes use a kind of tablet lunar calendar (on which there is, of course, no writing, but only marks), in order to show them which days they may expect to find the surf least violent, and so the weather the more fitting for their fishing and their other expeditions in their canoes. Yet one of the shrewdest of the Nicobarese would often come to me to inquire about the seasons—how far we had got on in the year—*i.e.* whether it was time for the rains to have come (or to have ceased) or not. He would also inquire if there were any forthcoming eclipse of the moon or of the sun. The eclipses are supposed to be due to a monster python endeavouring to swallow the sun or the moon, as the case may be; and one of the folk-tales tells how this gluttonous beast was once a human being (see *Folk-Tale*, No. XIII., p. 255).

When we would keep the feast of *Kun-seū-rö*, we must first make the ceremonial fire, and have the dances of *kin-töp-ha-ngö*. The fire is made by rubbing together two pieces of dry bamboo or other sticks. The feast is held during the waning of the moon, and for the whole night dancing is kept up, the place being illuminated by burning coco-nut shells, and on the following morning there is wrestling. After that, one month has to be observed within which time no light or fire may be shown on the beach in *el-panam*. In these days, however, the rule is very laxly kept, and sometimes there is hardly the pretence to shroud

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the light or fire used. Towards the end of the month active preparations are begun for the keeping of the feast. There is a good deal of real labour put in, though, as everyone is anxious to take his part, it does not come very heavy on any one individual. In addition to their labour, all the people (rich or poor) contribute something from their gardens for the common cooking pot, and the whole village shares in the common food.

The whole place, both the village proper (that is, all the *tu-hēts* or clusters of houses) and *el-panam*, is decorated with the young leaves of coco-palms, which are cut and twisted tastefully, also with other leaves, and with the very small and immature coco-nuts, which are stuck on sticks. These and also many kinds of fruits and vegetables will be arranged both inside the houses and in front of them.

The following account of the feast was given me by a reliable Nicobarese:—

Always once a year, at the beginning of the rains, they cook *ku-seū* (the wonderful concoction from which the feast takes its name). Many kinds of food are grated up, especially yams. Ripe bananas are kneaded up with it too—for they like the *ku-seū* to be sweet, but not too sweet. Unripe plantains are also used, but these are grated up and mixed with the food to be cooked. They also grate ripe coco-nuts, and put the grated mass in a little water, and then squeeze it in *nēm* (the cloth-like fibre which is found round the base of the leaves of the coco-palm); the liquid that is thus squeezed out is put into the *ku-seū*. All the people contribute in kind for the food at the



sacred feast; and if any family should happen at the time to be without yams, they will borrow some from their neighbours that they may have something to contribute.

Before the festival day comes they will have prepared a supply of coco-nut oil, which is made by crushing the half-roasted flesh of ripe nuts in a press which bears signs of its Burmese origin. This oil will be well boiled, and the big pots in which the food is to be cooked will be well rubbed and made to drip with it within, before the food is put into the pots. Also a coco-palm-leaf fence has been made round where the *ku-seū* is to be cooked, so as to keep off all impure beings and things.

The *ku-seū* is cooked in large Chowra pots, often two feet in diameter or even more; and the food is being stirred up continually lest it should get burnt by sticking to the sides of the pot. They go on during the whole night long putting fresh fuel on the fire and stirring up the food, for they want it to be properly cooked; and some kinds of food give an itching sensation to the hand, and to the palate, if they are not properly cooked. So two men are appointed to look after each cooking pot; and they take it turn and turn about to stir it up; whilst one woman is appointed to each pot to rub the inside with oil as the man stirs the mixture, so that the side of the pot may not get hot and burn the food.

People must not eat anything, nor chew betel, nor smoke, where the *ku-seū* is being cooked, for that is forbidden (or "for that were sin, an abomination"). Neither may they make any noise or shout. If they

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did not keep these regulations the pots would break, and no doubt many terrible disasters would befall the village. Also even in the houses in the village, some of which are far away from *el-panam* (which is on the beach), no one may split a green nut to eat; nor may they chop them lengthwise under any consideration.

At cockcrow they examine the food very carefully to see if it has been sufficiently cooked. This is a rather difficult matter, as they may not taste of the food until a portion of it has been first presented to the good powers to whose beneficence they owe (or may owe) all their blessings. Then, when the food is considered to be in the right condition, they fill a number of small Chowra pots with the *ku-señ*, and these are carried into every *tu-hēt* (cluster of houses) in the village. In the first instance the food is placed only on the young coco-nuts and the leaf decorations in front of the houses in the village.

Afterwards, when it has got light, the women come from the houses in the village, and the men too, with baskets and small pots to hold the *ku-señ*. Though it has now cooled down, and is not very hot, they do not eat any as yet; for that were sin.

Somewhere about nine o'clock they begin to kill the pigs appointed for the feast, each family killing one pig; and they sprinkle the blood on the palm-leaf decorations.

All sorts of fruits and vegetables are hung high up in their houses, suspended from the cross-beams which support the store-loft—yams, ripe coco-nuts, quite small immature nuts, jack-fruit, pine-apples, etc., and in pots some of the *ku-señ*. Outside the houses, rinds

of fruits and vegetables are hanging up, being tied on to boughs which have been driven into the ground in front of the houses. When the people place the *ku-seu* on the fruit and vegetables inside their houses, or on the husks outside, they will say: "May prosperity, from whatever quarter it may come, rest on our pigs, our nuts, our *pandanus* and on all our possessions."

After they have finished placing the *ku-seu* on their things in the village, they take their baskets and go to the beach to *el-panam* to give food to the canoes. Young leaves of immature coco-palms are stuck upright on the edge of the canoe, and three very small immature nuts are tied hanging down from the bars within the canoe.

After this they cut the throat of a chicken or pig, as the case may be, and sprinkle the blood on the canoe. Then they singe the chicken or pig with blazing torches of palm leaves. It is then cut open, and some of the flesh is cut up into small pieces as food for the canoe. The palm-leaf decoration is left in the canoe over the following night, and then thrown away in the morning. All the men attending on the canoe will have garlands round their necks, made of young banana leaves split and plaited rather neatly.

The next day is a solemn rest-day, at least until the evening. For the whole day they may not call the pigs, but only in the evening. Neither may they make any noise or do any work. In the evening, however, all the young men and boys go from their houses to the beach to *el-panam*, when the elder ones will roll along the paths the small immature coco-nuts which have been used in the decoration of their village, whilst the young lads stand in a row to pierce the nuts as they roll past,

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by stabbing them with sharpened sticks. This trundling of nuts does not take place on any other solemn rest-days, as, for example, on the days after a funeral, or after a "scare-devil" has been taken down.

On the following morning the able-bodied young men will go hunting the wild pigs in the jungle, and this brings us to the end of the feast.

## CHAPTER XIII

### DEATH & BURIAL

WHEN life is threatened by sickness or accident there is no other way of even attempting to ward off death than by propitiating or (with the aid of the witch-doctors) by terrifying the evil spirits that have caused the trouble—so that the patient may be released from their hands. The Nicobarese has an assured belief in a future existence, but the supposed conditions of that life do not give him much pleasure, and those who have departed this life are generally a source of considerable anxiety to their old friends and acquaintances, who are afraid that their late friend may pay them too much selfish attention, to their bodily harm. This feeling is behind many of the customs which the Nicobarese practise after a death or at the later feasts.

At least in the case of elderly folks, their death often seems to be dreaded quite as much by their relatives and friends as by the persons themselves. Indeed suicide is far more common than one would have imagined to be the case with such a primitive people. A very common cause of suicide is that a man finds that his wife is unfaithful to him, and he is ashamed; for I feel certain that it is shame and a wounded *amour-propre*, rather than a disappointed unselfish affection, that causes him to take his life. Others are wearied with sickness, and wish for a change, what-

ever it may bring. I do not remember to have heard of any case of a woman committing suicide. Sometimes those who are sick and wearied, without actually wishing to die, come to the conclusion that they are certainly going to die, and then they turn their faces to the wall and actually do die, often (I imagine) when there is no sufficient physical cause for their doing so. A few years ago an old man lost a tooth, and took that as an omen that his time had come; so he made a big funeral feast to his village and friends in anticipation of his death, which followed duly.

When it is assumed that a sickness is going to prove fatal, and that the patient will die very shortly, friends and relatives assemble round the sick man, and try to arrest his attention by calling out loudly to him, or by any other means that may occur to them, so that if it be possible they may prevent or delay the passing of his spirit to the other world. That world, known as *pa-nam siö* (the land of spirits) and *ki-tēl-kō-re*, is actually only a few miles away, being in the marshy and malarious central part of the island. It is, however, a land forbidden to the living, unless they be witch-doctors or at least novices; whilst as to its being near, they would probably be much better satisfied if it were far, far away.

If the dying man or woman is at all well off, the people of the house, and sometimes other friends, will show them their much-prized treasures, such as large plated or nickel forks and spoons, silver or nickel wire, and tridents made by the people of Chowra from very thin imported iron. If the dying person seems to take any notice of the things, and to long for them,

they are chopped in pieces after his death; but if he seems to disregard them, they are not destroyed; he does not want them.

Sometimes a person is taken whilst still alive to one of the dead-houses which are on the beach in *el-panam*, hard by the cemetery; but if he has not, on his death all his friends are called, and the body is carried down without much delay to one of the "unclean" houses there. When anyone dies, whether big or little, rich or poor, male or female, each group of houses (*tu-hēi*) in the village to which he belongs will contribute one fathom (*i.e.* two yards—the nautical term is in regular use) of white and one fathom of red cotton cloth wherein to wrap the corpse.

After the body has been deposited in the dead-house, which, like houses generally, is ordinarily round, and has its floor raised some six or eight feet from the ground, the corpse is washed in the liquid of three immature coco-nuts cut from a palm the nuts of which remain green even when ripe. The body is then clad in new clothes; and often the richer folks will deck the corpse with silver wire and with necklaces of two-anna bits, and with bangles of silver and nickel; whilst sometimes many rupees or dollars will also be bestowed upon the corpse, either within the folds of the shroud or upon them, just within the coffin. The coffin itself is of course an innovation, being a following of the English custom.

Others are meanwhile shaping some pieces of wood, preferably such as have been reserved from a canoe that was sawn or chopped up on the occasion of some big funeral that took place some time before. The

corpse is tied on to these pieces to make the whole rigid. Then the corpse and these pieces are wrapped in *chamam* (the spathe of the giant palm); and round this will be many folds of white and red cloth. It is then strapped up with cane, and often covered with still more folds of cloth. The wrapping needs to be done very carefully so as to permit the corpse to be bared in the neighbourhood of the heart as it lies in the grave. The funeral will take place on the same or on the following day.

The grave is dug on the old ground on the beach in *el-panam*, which has been used (I suppose) for many generations. There is sand on the surface, and below that the coral rock, which (when necessary) they will cut with axes. These axes of course become "unclean," and may not afterwards be used for any clean purpose, least of all any work connected with the providing of food or the building of a house. A rich man will generally buy a new axe for the purpose, and it will be left behind in the cemetery for the use of mourners on future occasions. Considering how often in the past most of the ground must have been dug up, it is astonishing to find how hard it sometimes is. They generally dig down about five feet; and their customs require that the grave shall be fairly broad.

Before the corpse is removed from the dead-house, the relatives will gather round the bier and wail with cries and tears; and they bid the departed a last farewell. Then the bier, on which often rest several changes of raiment for the departed, is taken downstairs by those who are ceremonially unclean



through having had to touch the corpse or to dig the grave. Then, by the old Nicobarese custom in the case of rich people, the bier is placed on a canoe, which is dragged some distance through *el-panam*, beyond the traders' shops, and towards the Nicobarese houses. I have not heard of a case where the canoe was actually dragged into the native village; there would be a double difficulty about doing this. The paths are often not very wide or very straight, and it would probably be necessary to cut down a number of trees before the canoe could be dragged into the village; and if it were done, the village, methinks, would become unclean, or at least in danger of molestation by the spirit of the departed and others. When the canoe, with the corpse on it, has been brought back again to the neighbourhood of the dead-house, there is a good tug-of-war in which hundreds (it may be) join. Ropes of cane of great strength are fastened at each end of the canoe, and the thing specially desired is that they may succeed in pulling the canoe in two. But this cannot be done, for the deceased lady (or gentleman) is honoured by being placed in a good sound canoe in which henceforward no one shall sail. So subsidiary portions of the canoe may be torn off, and the ropes will snap; but axes and saws have to be brought to break up the canoe.

Then the body is taken to the grave, and men go down into the grave to receive the corpse; and these men afterwards will several times over, with bunches of leaves brought for the purpose, gently sweep up and drive out of the grave their own spirits, which might take a fancy to lurk and hide and

stay down in that hole. After the corpse is lowered, the cloth over the heart is pulled aside; and chickens and sometimes young pigs are brought and stabbed in sundry places, and the blood is caused to drip or flow on the region of the heart of the deceased. These chickens and young pigs are then flung as an offering to the deceased into the grave, and buried along with the corpse. There must be an odd number of these offerings for the dead, and similarly of the number of fathoms of the white and of the red cloth in which the corpse is wrapped—"it were an abomination to have an even number." The earth is often shovelled in with the paddle of a canoe which has been cut short for the purpose. If there are any more pigs or fowls to be offered, they cannot all be buried in the grave; so they are completely burnt on the foreshore, along with all the bedding and wraps; and, together with the fragments of all vessels, plates and other things used by the deceased in his last sickness, which have been brought down and destroyed, the ashes are cast into the sea.

Some few years ago, at the burial of the mother of one of the richest men in the place, quite a large number of pigs lay tied up underneath the dead-house, so that the good lady, as she was being carried out—not indeed to her long home, but to her resting-place for two or three years—might perceive by the number of pigs that lay there for whole burnt-offerings in what honour she was held, and so in her vain pleasure might desist from troubling the living. When, however, she had been safely buried, and it was now night and dark, most of the

pigs were set free and returned home. Probably three of the very smallest had been killed in sacrifice.

After a burial, all who have taken any part in it go down into the water and wash their feet; only after they have done this may they go into any "good" house (*i.e.* any house except those which are ceremonially unclean). It is now beginning to get dark, so on their return from the water they will brandish brightly blazing torches of palm leaf to frighten away the spirits of the dead, or any other evil spirits, which might be tempted to follow them.

When night has fallen all the people go again to *el-panam* for a feast which is held in one of the "good" houses, generally in the "village hall." All the people living in the *tu-hēt* (group of houses) in which the deceased used to live will contribute and cook rice, yams and any other food from their gardens which may be in season; whilst the representatives of the deceased will give and kill and cook pigs, as far as they are able to do so. Sometimes (I am told) as many as ten big pigs will be killed for this festival; for the Nicobarese are gross eaters upon good opportunity. The young men will challenge one another to an eating competition. "Can you manage a ham?"—*i.e.* eat a whole one yourself—is a question that is sometimes put, and answered in the affirmative; though in such a case the pig would be comparatively a small one.

Before they begin the feast, the spoons and forks and other things which are to be chopped up as a propitiation to the spirit of the deceased are destroyed; and this is done preferably by the guests

invited from other villages. After the feast they prepare the gifts which the guests from every village represented have to take back with them—namely, for each a piece of pork, cooked or uncooked, and weighing perhaps three and a half pounds, also a couple of big slices of cooked yams, and two loin-cloths (*ki-sāt*), the one white and the other red. By the bearers of these presents the message is sent to all who did not come to the feast that So-and-so is dead, and that therefore his village is taboo—which means that the friends of the deceased may not be visited in the usual social way until after the Ossuary Feast.

The next day is one of solemn rest for the mourners. After three, five or seven, or sometimes nine or eleven, days—in all cases an odd number of days—from the funeral there is a purification of the mourners, or (as the Nicobarese would say) of the deceased, and a chicken is burnt over the grave. Before this purification festival has been held, the mourners may not sing or dance or laugh; nor may they eat oranges, limes or other fruit (though this restriction does not include coco-nuts and *pandanus*). Those who are “unclean” (by reason of contact with the corpse, etc.) are also forbidden to eat fish; and in no case may they touch their food or their cigarettes with their hands or fingers. Someone else must also strike a light for them, as well as put their cigarettes or cheroots into their mouths. Their food must be put into their mouths by those who are “clean”; or they may pick it up with forks, etc., though these things would probably in turn become “unclean.” They will often eat ripe coco-nut which someone else has

chopped up for them, putting the pieces into their mouths with a small stick or skewer.

Sometimes friends from other villages are also invited to this second feast; sometimes they are not—this is settled as the executors of the deceased personally feel inclined. At this festival also there is a further chopping up of spoons and forks. Formerly at these feasts a great quantity of cotton cloth of various kinds would be torn or cut up and destroyed, but nowadays very little is destroyed in Car Nicobar; rather is it kept to deck out their houses at the great Ossuary Feast.

At this purification festival the women plait, checker-wise, narrow strips of white and red cloth round the memorial post which has been prepared to mark the grave of the deceased. This post is a round log, some twelve inches in diameter, which has been slightly smoothed. It will be sunk deep in the ground, and when erected will stand about two and a half feet high above the ground. At the top of the post there is a small hole through which, while the feast is being kept, a stick is pushed, and spoons and forks are tied on to this stick. These spoons are not chopped up, but are put there to be admired by all spectators. Other spoons, however, are nailed on to the post, as also are a number of coins—two-anna bits, four-anna bits and whole rupees. These are not removed, but remain on the memorial post when it is erected in the cemetery.

This feast, like the last one, is held in the evening (*i.e.* after sunset) in *el-panam*, in one of the clean houses, probably in the village hall. A basket of food for the



A CAR NICOBARESE CEMETERY, WITH THE DEAD-HOUSE FOR THE MORIBUND AND THOSE ABOUT TO BE BURIED.

The grave posts, as seen in the picture, are often decorated with rupees, and with four or two anna bits, which are nailed on them.



deceased is prepared, being filled with pork; and sometimes a betel-box of Burmese make, an English table-knife and a *dah* (or chopper) are added; and the basket is hung up for the night in the doorway of the house. In the morning this basket and its contents are thrown into the sea, and the memorial post is planted in the ground. There is again a feed in the village hall in the morning after this has been done, and then the rites of purification for the mourners generally are over.

When one examined the memorial posts in the cemetery one used to find places where rupees and four-anna bits, and even two-anna bits, had manifestly been nailed on to the posts; but they had afterwards been wrenched off—no doubt in the night by the Burmese or by the dependents of the Indian traders. For this reason, latterly very few whole rupees have been nailed to the posts, and not even so many two-anna bits as formerly.

For some time longer, up to a month or so, the “unclean” may still not touch even their own food with their fingers, nor do any clean work—*i.e.* such as is concerned directly or indirectly with the preparation of food, or the building of a house; nor may they go into the houses in the village. They merely stay on at *el-panam*, wasting away their time, or perhaps doing a little weeding there. The Government Agent, however, has learnt that the repairing of the bridle-path round the island, or the carrying up of goods (other than food or tobacco) from the beach to the Agency house, is not “clean” work, and that it were *not* an abomination to employ the idle folks on such tasks. When the time



comes they go home without any further ceremony of purification.

Not only are the things which have been used by the deceased person during his last sickness destroyed, but also other household effects, including a number of spoons and forks, and sometimes much new cloth. Also, at the funeral of the rich, a canoe is often destroyed; whilst in most cases some of the outside property of the deceased is destroyed—*e.g.* coco-palms and fruit-trees.

Theoretically, perhaps, all the property of the deceased is destroyed on his death, so that the shade of the deceased may enjoy it for his own use; or (more probably) it was regarded merely as a propitiation of the deceased, so that he might feel that he had no reason to begrudge the lot of those whom he had had to leave behind in the world. But in Car Nicobar to-day a very small proportion of the palms which a rich man possesses will be destroyed on his death; though many of the palms will be made taboo for a number of years, and so they will be "unclean" and may not be used for food or drink by any of the inhabitants. The people of Car Nicobar are as astute in keeping the letter of their law whilst breaking the spirit of it as were the ancient Romans, and they reckon it perfectly legitimate for them to cut down and to sell to foreign traders the nuts of trees which are taboo. Indeed some of the people are said to go one step further, and to mark as taboo any trees which, from their position on the roadside and their distance from other trees, are specially liable to be fixed upon by travellers as suitable for supplying them with drink and food.

A few sticks will be driven into the ground, and some husks of coco-nuts and some coco-palm leaves will be tied on the sticks, and this means that these coco-palms all around are taboo. A few sticks charred at one end denote that the deceased person owned land on which it is now for the present forbidden to gather firewood; a little piece of mat, a few inches square, means that the cane is not to be cut; and a few *pandanus* seeds and refuse parings mark that the *pandanus* here is taboo.

Names too are tabooed. The people do not like to use the name of someone who has died recently, for fear that the spirit should be attracted by hearing his own name spoken, and so come when he was not wanted. There are of course no family names; but any name may have some common root in it, which is normally in very frequent use in daily life; and to have to invent new names for such things, for fear that some departed spirit should hurry back again, would certainly be a great inconvenience, and not much attention to this principle is nowadays paid by the people of Car Nicobar. This same principle, however, seems to be the cause why all but two of the villages of Car Nicobar have different names to-day from what they had when the Government first held a survey of the island; though the older names are still used by the Government, and sometimes by others. Personal names in Nicobarese are often very long; but it is quite sufficient in ordinary conversation to use only the first syllable or two—so there would naturally be the greater risk of drawing a person's attention by a word recalling his name than if the whole name of the

person had been regularly used when he was spoken to, or of, by others.

On the islands of Chowra and Teressa the dead are swathed in cloths and wrapped in leaves and put into one half of a canoe which has been cut across for the purpose. This is placed on posts about six feet from the ground. In some cases the use of part of a canoe seems to be dispensed with, and the corpse is placed in the fork of a tree. According to the *Census Report* of 1901, in Chowra these canoes are kept in a cemetery in a thick grove about fifty yards from *el-panam*; in Teressa they are on the beach. The bodies rapidly decompose; or may fall and be devoured by the pigs. Every three or four years the bones are collected and thrown away into the communal ossuary at the appointed feast.

The folk-tale of "Öt-nya-hum-ku" shows that the tree-burial was once prevalent in Car Nicobar (*Folk-Tale*, No. XIV., p. 256).

## CHAPTER XIV

### KA-NA-AÑ HA-UN: OR THE OSSUARY FEAST

TWO, three or four years after the funeral (and one may say every two or three years, for the feast is one for the whole village) a council is held of all the elders of the village to consider the question of keeping the Ossuary Feast (called, in Nicobarese, *Ka-na-añ Ha-un*, "the Feast of the Eating of Pork"). This meeting may be as much as ten months prior to the festival. If all are agreeable and able to contribute, they fix a day for the setting up of a post whereon are to be placed the offerings for the dead. They then cut down in the jungle some straight tree, of about the height of a coco-palm—say sixty or seventy feet in length—and it is carried to the village. They chisel holes through it, and put in pegs on which the food is to be tied, and when everything has been prepared it is erected. A hole is dug in the ground to plant the post in, and other posts are also sunk into the ground, to which it is tied to steady it. It is also fastened in position with long ropes of cane, such as they use for the rigging of their canoes, and indeed it looks very much like the mast of a ship. The Nicobarese have not yet learnt the use of the pulley. The post itself, including of course what is tied on it, is called *nya-añ ku-pah* ("food of corpses," not strictly "of the dead").

After the post has been erected the food is strung

together, and a man climbs the post, holding on to a thin rope—not of cane, but generally of strong fishing-line cord purchased from the traders. He continues to draw up more of the cord, which he passes over one of the pegs, and then lowers the end of it again to another man who stands at the foot of the post. When the part of the lowered rope reaches this man, the two ends are tied together to form an endless chain. Some food is placed in a basket, and it is hoisted up, and fastened on to one of the pegs by the man who has climbed the post. Yams of various kinds, ripe coco-nuts, bananas, *pandanus* fruit, betel-nut, cigarettes and pieces of pork (in baskets) are thus sent up and all tied on the pegs. Indeed the quantity of food thus offered to the dead is quite considerable, and the work in connection with the erection of the post may take many weeks. The post with the food on it is left standing until the Ossuary Feast. From the time of the erection of the post to the great festival itself no pigs may be killed in the village. Sometimes, however, when a village is very poor, there is no *nya-an ku-pah* erected at all, and the whole feast is kept in a humbler way.

Then about a month before the festival the people of the village which is going to hold the feast severally go to their friends in all the other villages to tell them about the coming feast (literally, “to tell them that they wish to eat pork”). After this, as the time is getting near, they prepare pens for the pigs (one pen for each pig to be killed), including some movable pens or crates. On the ninth day of the waxing of the moon they go again to invite their friends from

the other villages. The festival may be held at any time of the year that they regard as convenient; but the wet season would naturally be avoided, and probably also November and December, which they would regard as very cold, at least if there should be rain at the same season, as sometimes happens. The time about the new moon is naturally the best, not only for those who have to travel any distance, but also for the performance of the various duties and pleasures of the people themselves of the village. "The day after to-morrow," say the messengers, "there will be the decoration of the houses," which inside will be decked out with a great display of cloth and of spoons and forks, etc. "On the third day the pigs will be put into the pens, and on the fourth day they will be slaughtered."

Some of the invited guests will come on the day of the decoration of the houses, and will help their hosts, who are extremely busy with the other preparations, by themselves carrying in the pigs which are to be killed, beginning with those which are the nearest to the village. Some of the piggeries in the hinterland may be two or three miles away from the village. The pig is generally caught with the hand, one man laying hold of it by the fore-leg and throwing it over whilst another man was feeding it, and a third man shading its eyes with *ra-foh* (the spathe of the betel-nut, which is often used as a dish or plate, and closely resembles *chamam*, only this latter is much bigger). The more timid or wild ones, however, have to be caught with a noose or a crook.

The pigs when caught have their legs tied and are carried on a pole round to the various groups of houses

in the village, so that all may admire them, before they are deposited each in its own particular pen. Sometimes a crate or cage with the pig in it is carried round, and possibly with youths sitting or jumping about on the top of the crate. The youths who are carrying the pigs are very merry, and sing songs they have composed in praise of the pig, as they say, or as we should rather say, judging by the matter of the song, about pigs and their own success or failure in catching them, with mention also of any other interesting incidents of the "fair." Sometimes the language is such as would not bear translation into any civilized language. Wherever they go carrying the pigs, the people of the different houses are continually pressing on them betel-nut or cigarettes, according to their choice. There is also hung up round all the houses an abundance of betel-nut, ripe bananas and green coco-nuts, for the refreshment of the visitors during the feast; these they take just as they feel inclined. No more happy occasion is imaginable to the Nicobarese mind than this festival, and, as one of their folk-tales says, the sight of the youths carrying the pigs and of all the merry crowd would surely be sufficient (one thinks) to banish sorrow from any heart (see *Folk-Tale*, No. IX., p. 246; and for one of their songs of a character superior to most, see Appendix B).

After the carriers have severally returned to the houses of their hosts, and have deposited the pigs each in its appointed place, they will rest a bit, and wait for such of their comrades as have not yet got back with their pigs.



A LIBERAL OFFERING TO THE SPIRITS.

*Nya-an-Ku-pah* is a most elaborate offering of fruit, vegetables, etc., to the spirits of those who have died within the last few years. This sacrificial offering is made some months before the Ossuary Feast, and remains standing until the feast, when it is cut down, and pigs and other scavengers are allowed to consume the remains.





At Kemnyus village, a small place on the south coast with some three or four hundred inhabitants, in March 1912, between three and four hundred pigs in all were duly carried and slaughtered at their Ossuary Feast. The number of pigs killed is always very great, though generally not so excessive as in this case.

Then all prepare for the dance—all the visitors, that is, for the people of the village are much too busy to find any time for dancing themselves until after the visitors have left. On this occasion the women dance first, by themselves; and each one has on two dresses or complete costumes, for they must display their bravery. The dancing *must* be kept up all night, at least at that group of houses (*tu-hēi*) in which the post with the food for the dead on it (*nya-añ ku-pah*) has been erected. So the messengers sent round beforehand to notify their friends about the coming feast always make a point of especially inviting those who are reputed to be skilled in the dance. All are desirous of acquitting themselves with credit, and every village which is not prevented from taking part in the festival by sicknesses or deaths—the latter of which renders the people “unclean,” when it were sin to dance with “clean” people—will provide a group of dancers who have practised a good bit together, and who will sometimes render a new song and a new dance.

Next morning they cut down the post (*nya-añ ku-pah*), and it, together with the food—putrid or otherwise—on it, is thrown away into the jungle. Then there is a kind of sacrifice: a selected pig is

taken out of its pen, the bar being chopped to get it out, and it is killed as an offering. Most of the flesh, however, is eaten by the people; but a string is passed through some of the good flesh, and this, together with the intestines, is deposited on the place where the *nya-an' ku-pah* stood. Some green coco-palm leaves, on which the blood of the offering has been sprinkled, serve as the altar on which the sacrifice is laid.

After this all the pigs which are to be killed for hospitality towards their guests and friends are taken out of the pens and slaughtered somewhere near the village. Then the pigs are singed over the fierce flames of palm-leaf torches, and this is considered a sufficient roasting. After this midday meal a portion of pork is given to all the visitors, beginning with those who have come from the most distant villages. Everything excepting the lower jaw and the lungs is given away; these remain the property of the owner of the pig; and a lower jaw-bone which contains abnormally large tusks will be prized for many years as a memorial of the feast, and find an honoured place on the walls of the house. After this distribution of food any who wish to do so are at liberty to return home. Most of the people, however, prefer to remain to see the next performance, which must be interesting, and certainly has a large element of danger in it.

Some of the most savage pigs from the jungle are let out of their pens one by one in the latter part of the afternoon, and some strong and active young men who are skilled in laying hold of pigs by the

ears are chosen to play with them. It is strange indeed that a man can sit on his haunches and stay a savage large pig by holding it by its ears; but it is regularly done. If, as sometimes happens, the man gets a bad bite in an awkward part of his body, or if he gets ripped by a boar's tusk in arm or leg, the boar is at once speared by the multitude standing by. It were sin (or "an abomination") for young folks to eat the flesh of a boar which has gashed a man; only seasoned older folks might venture to do that. After the playing with the pigs most of the guests will return home.

On the morrow the specially fat pigs are killed and reduced to lard, to contain which a great number of ripe coco-nut shells have been prepared as bottles, all the flesh of the nuts having been got out of them with special knives made for this purpose, which they are able to purchase (with nuts) from the traders.

Again there will be dancing kept up all through the night, but this time mainly by the villagers themselves, who up to this time have been much too busy to find time to dance; but a number of their friends from the neighbouring villages will also have come over again to join them in the dance.

On the following day they make preparations for digging up the bones of their deceased friends. They will first draw from their wells what water may be required until the very end of this business; and they will cover it over, so that the spirit-laden breeze from the bones may not blow upon it. The women mourners will then squat down by the memorial posts and wail. Others are cutting down palm leaves and

will make a fence of upright leaves completely round the cemetery, excepting on the side where they go in and out, which is towards the unclean place in the very near jungle where the bones will be thrown away. All who enter within this enclosure will be "unclean" for a month or two, and subject to all the restrictions laid on such persons. The object of the fence is to prevent the stench, if there should be any, and still more the unclean spirits, of which there are certainly a multitude, from being wafted over towards the village hall and other "good" (*i.e.* ceremonially clean) houses in *el-panam*. These "good" houses too have been further protected by laying green palm leaves against them, so that the evil spirits, which are always remarkably stupid, may not perceive them.

Only the bones of persons who have been dead a good while (two years or so) are dug up; for otherwise there would be flesh on them, despite the lime in the coral rock where the graves are. If the bones are found to have still putrid flesh cleaving to them, they are put back again into the ground, to await the time when the festival next comes round. If there have been many deaths in the village in the last four or five years, the digging up of the bones may take one or two whole days.

At Nancowry the digging is often done with pieces of wood and with the hands. The men will have a little relaxation during the work in the form of friendly sparring; the women will be sitting round and wailing; but sometimes they do this in a weird and not unmelodious way. Whilst the men are digging up the bones the *tō-mi-lūō-nō* (witch-doctor) stands at the head

and with a bunch of special leaves fans away the evil spirits.

When the bones are dug up they are wiped with the hand; and each person's bones are placed separately on a piece of *chamam* (the spathe of the giant palm) and bound round with new cloth, in the same way in which the fresh corpse is bound up. When all the bones are thus wrapped up, they are placed in one or more of the "unclean" houses (*i.e.* the dead-houses) in *el-panam*; where also those persons sleep who are themselves "unclean"—that is, all who have been engaged in the work of digging up the bones, or in wrapping them up, or in any other unclean task. Lamps will be kept burning all night, for evil spirits revel in the darkness; and some of the mourners too may be up wailing for a great part of the night.

At Nancowry, in the Central Islands, the skull is washed by the widow, or some near relative of the deceased, in the liquid of the unripe coco-nut, just in the stage when it is best for drinking. The skull is also rubbed with saffron, and afterward put on a plate on a kind of altar specially prepared for it. A hat is also placed on the skull—the kind of hat varies according to the sex of the deceased. On the hat are fastened cigarettes, about which strips of red and white cloth have been wound. Food is also served to the skull, whilst the "unclean" people sit around and have their own meal. None of these customs prevail in Car Nicobar; though there, too, the skull of a rich or influential man will be washed with coco-nut liquid or with salt water, and then wrapped in

cloth and buried again in the cemetery. Fowls or pigs will be sacrificed, and the warm blood caused to drip on it; and a new memorial head-post will be erected—all as was done at the original funeral. This skull will be dug up at the next festival of *ka-na-an ha-un*, and may possibly be then buried again. If the skull is not re-interred all the silver that was buried with the corpse will be taken away and thrown into the deep sea; if the skull is re-interred, they will be buried again with it.

Though toddy (*tari*) is always largely consumed at their festivals, among the many hundreds of people whom I have seen returning from these feasts, I have never seen a Nicobarese really drunk.

Dancing is kept up all through the night of the day of the digging up of the bones, and also after the filling up of the graves, which takes place on the following day. People of the neighbouring villages are also invited to come to the dances, but the "unclean" do not dance with them, nor with the "clean" (literally, "good") people of their own village, for the "unclean" may not touch with their hands anyone or anything that is "clean." So the "unclean," both men and women, form their own tolerably big group and dance by themselves. They will have bathed in the sea before they dance, or at least will have washed their hands and feet.

After two or three weeks, there being no fixed period, there is another festival (or ferial) day, when they have sports in the morning, beginning with a very crude kind of single-stick fencing. They use sticks of that kind of extremely brittle wood of which

the magicians (*tō-mi-lūō-nō*) make their magic rods for beating the evil spirits, and their swords for invisibly splitting open the bodies of living men and women in order to extract the noxious foreign matter that there is in them. If a piece snaps off the stick of the assailant and hits the other in the back, that one is supposed to be defeated. The cutting of those sticks had not been free from risks, and when they returned from the jungle with them, the whole party, including the dogs, would come in wearing garlands made of tender banana leaves split and plaited. The single-stick fencing is followed by wrestling matches.

After the sports comes the more solemn business of the day. The leaves forming the fence round the cemetery, and those which have been laid against the village hall and other "clean" houses, as a screen and protection, are then thrown away. In Nancowry, however, they are put in a line, sometimes forty feet long, and lighted by the new sacred fire which has been generated by rubbing two dry sticks together. The men mourners, and often other men too, will run the whole length of this fierce blazing fire of coco-palm leaves. They generally come out of the fire without much harm; but the heat has singed the hair of their bodies, and even of their heads.

Before the big dinner and the dancing the "unclean" will all have bathed, and have cast away their unclean garments, and have clad themselves with new clothes. Now also the cloth and spoons and forks which have been displayed in the houses are removed; they are not destroyed, as probably was once the rule, but are put in boxes and stowed away for a future occasion.



In the evening a dance is held, and continued until morning.

A short time after this two or three of them will go to some village to challenge their neighbours to a big boat-race. If those who have been sent do not return immediately, the villagers know that the challenge has been accepted. Afterward, as is indeed usual after a big race, a sacrifice is made and food is offered to the canoe. A fowl is killed by having its head cut off, and a little of the warm blood is dripped on the canoes. Also after the big boat-race they have a big *ma-a-fāi* dance, when the invited guests from other villages are the performers, the hosts themselves not taking any part in it. This brings the Ossuary Feast (*ka-na-an ha-un*) to a close.

In the words of Mr De Roepstorff, a member of the Andaman Commission who lived for several years at Nancowry, in the Central Nicobar Islands, and who was murdered there by a Sepoy soldier who had run amuck: "Thus do the Nicobarese exorcise and conciliate their *dū manes*. Their *feralia* spread over a long time; and by the time that the mourning for one friend is over, maybe a new cycle has commenced"—if not in their own village, at least in a neighbouring one.



#### AN INFERIOR TYPE OF NICOBARESE HOUSE,

having its doorway at the end of the house, whilst the entrance to the usual type of house is through an aperture in the floor, which can be covered by a trap-door.

#### A GRAVEYARD AT NANCOWRY.

The belongings of the deceased are hung over his grave. The Nicobarese of the central and southern groups are much more backward and untidy than the men of Car Nicobar.



## CHAPTER XV

### THE LIFE & CHARACTER OF THE NICOBARESE

**T**HE account we have already given of the manners and customs of the Nicobarese should have given also some insight into the life and character of this primitive people, whose easy-going, simple life is nearly as free from care and anxiety as we can expect to find anywhere except in the land of the Hesperides, or of the Lotophagi—if indeed this latter land be not the very Nicobars.

A condition so free from the worries and fretfulness of our modern life; a land where the law, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," seems never to have been promulgated, or at least enforced; where there is extreme keenness to display skill in games in competition with others, side by side with the spirit of generosity which would deprecate the statement that they surpassed their neighbours; where everyone is anxious that he should be second to none, but hardly less anxious that his neighbour should not be second to himself; where not only is sport utterly free from gambling, but the very idea of rent for houses or land, or of interest on money, as of rates and taxes, seems almost impossible and incomprehensible; where money is not wanted, and the chief use to which silver rupees are put is to make an offering to the dead; where even in their cups men's voices are rarely raised in anger, and their hands

still less so; where even when the extremest wrong is done to a man he will destroy his own property, damage his own person, or take his own life, rather than seek to damage or destroy the life or property of his enemy—the very word “enemy” being so abnormal that it requires a conglomeration of seven syllables or words to express it: *tō-ku-nya-han-el-mat-re*—all this is so strangely different from our Western experience that it might seem to be the story of a totally different world.

Yet, at the same time, when we begin to penetrate beneath the surface, we not only perceive the truth of the old saying that those who cross the ocean do but change their country and not their nature; we also see that all mankind is one, being akin and of one blood and nature, and that however different the conditions of the life of man and the expressions of his feelings, there are the same instincts working in the whole race; and we are reminded of the saying of Artemus Ward that “there is a great deal of human nature in man after all.”

We have endeavoured to put before the reader the life of the Nicobarese as it is; or perhaps rather as it was a dozen years ago. “The unchanging East” changes rapidly under certain conditions, as we all know of the wider fields of India, China, Japan and elsewhere. Contact of men in a higher with those in a lower state of civilization always brings some loss to both parties; it depends upon the circumstances whether the contact shall bring a balance of profit or of loss. Naturally the old disregard for money, and to a large extent for wealth of coco-palms, cannot continue in-

definitely side by side with traders' shops, where even a pair of nuts can be exchanged for tobacco sufficient for several much-prized cigarettes. "They will soon learn to steal if they begin to get money," said a working-class woman in England to me on hearing of their life and conditions. Their old standard of truthfulness, which made those who had killed someone of their own race (because he was a "bad" man, "possessed of a devil") confess it at once, giving all details and the names of their accomplices to the inquiring Magistrate, cannot be expected to continue in a community which is not a family, where a person is rewarded or punished for what he does rather than for what he is, and where confession means punishment. About a dozen years ago, when I was officiating as Government Agent in the island, there was brought before me a man named Hant, of no fixed abode, who had been stealing to a considerable extent from a trader's shop; he was deservedly very unpopular, and was not wanted by his own people. He told me a cock-and-bull story, and on cross-examination contradicted his own statements; and when I reproved him for telling lies, which even Nicobarese prisoners generally did not do, he replied: "I told the truth once and got a beating. I told it on a second occasion when I was had up and got sent down as prisoner to Nancowry. I told the truth a third time and was sent off to Port Blair. So I thought it was now time to try lying."

Under the old conditions the people were remarkably honest; for besides the difficulty of imagining what one might steal, there were no means of disposing of stolen goods or of hiding them. In the Nicobarese houses

there is absolutely no privacy, and everyone's affairs are normally known to everyone else. So it was that the case of theft tried by Mr D'Oyly in 1912 was the first case in living Nicobarese experience of a Nicobarese man stealing property from a Nicobarese house. Again, the almost unbounded hospitality of the people, together with the recognized right of the traveller to as much coco-nut as he could eat or drink, took away most of the temptation to steal food. Also a Nicobarese dependent would be considered to have his right to partake of whatever his master had committed to him; and so strong was this feeling that it was much more probable that a bag of rice left on the open beach all night would be found untouched in the morning, than that a bag which had been left "for safety" at one of the "good" houses on the beach would be found intact.

Still there had always been from time to time some "bad" men who would steal other people's pigs and cut out the ear-marks of the real owner; and there were other weak people, not nearly so bad, who would see big bunches of tempting ripe bananas in their neighbour's garden and, thinking that there was no one to see them, would carry them off. Probably in most cases the whole thing came out. Perhaps there was someone up in a palm tapping toddy, or someone coming along silently by a by-path; for the Nicobarese are a quiet people, and absolute stillness is no sure proof that there is no one about. Or perhaps the man would give himself away unintentionally when telling how and where he got the things; for, as my old Indian orderly said, "The Nicobarese do not know how to lie"; whilst

many a one who had not been detected by his neighbours would, through his conscience giving him *un mauvais quart d'heure*, voluntarily go to the man whose property he had stolen and confess his misdeeds and take his punishment. Of course stealing from a shop, or from any foreigner, was not regarded as a very heinous offence—at least, if you were not found out.

Nowadays there is always the shop ready to receive nuts, without any close inquiring as to whence they came. The casual Nicobarese will cut a load of nuts (from twenty to forty pairs), and then suddenly bethink himself of some matter or other, and will not go straight back home, but off in another direction to see his friend. So he will put the nuts on the yoke ready for carrying; and then chipping out a tiny piece of the trunk of a palm will deposit the load there, safe from the pigs, by the wayside, to stay there until he finds it convenient to take it home. He will leave it there—it may be for many days—a perpetual temptation to steal to any of the Nicobarese whose banking account (*i.e.* the condition of his coco-palms) is not very satisfactory.

So it was that my old friend Cain, the headman of Kinmai, the adjoining village to Mus, got into trouble. He had been out all night fishing and had taken nothing, and, as the north-east monsoon made landing on the Kinmai beach difficult, he had left his canoe on the beach in Sawi Bay, in Mus township. In the morning as he was going home he passed several of these ready-prepared loads of nuts waiting to be taken, and at last, thinking that it was a pity to go home empty-handed after a whole night's work, he looked this way and that, and neither saw nor heard anyone.

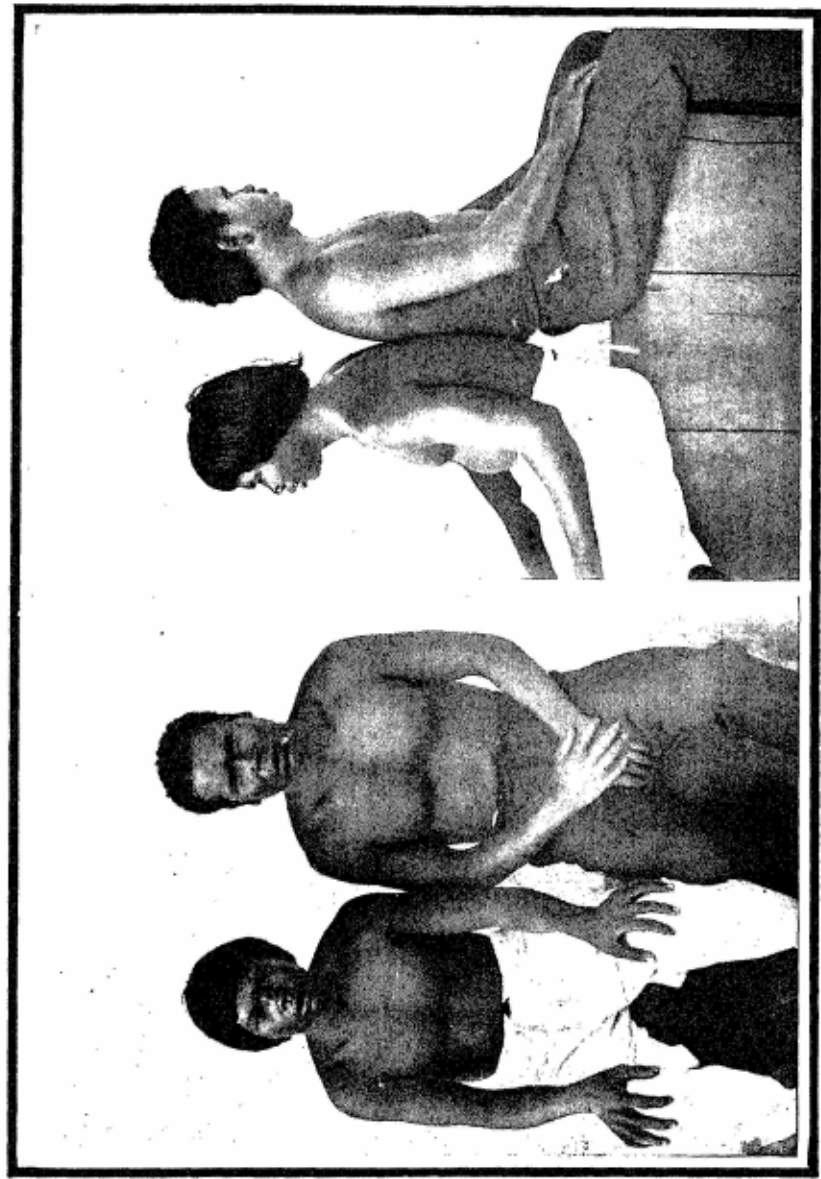


So he took one or two steps off from the right path, put the load on his shoulder and went home with it. But he was seen, and my dear old friend Offandi, the headman of Mus, was at once informed, and he called an assembly of the elders to consider the matter. Had Cain been a resident of Mus township the matter would have been perfectly simple: the Mus elders would have had authority to fine or to flog him. But so peaceful was Nicobarese life, except on the very rare occasions when marauding pirates (black or brown or white) assaulted them, that their constitution and ancient custom had provided no direct means for settling inter-village disputes. Had the offender been some less important person, no doubt the influence of the Mus elders would have been brought to bear on the Kinmai elders, and the man would have been punished. As it was, the Mus elders could only tell the man whose nuts had been stolen to go to Cain and demand a pig as compensation for the theft—this being the usual fine in any matter; though normally the pig would be killed and a portion of pork sent round to all the houses concerned, with a notification that the complainant and defendant were friends again. However, Cain refused to give the pig, and said that he had not got one (*sc.* to give); though he did not deny the theft. The man returned to his own village and told the elders, who sadly came to the conclusion that nothing could be done officially; though they thought that on further consideration Cain would repent, and would voluntarily come to them and acknowledge his offence, and be ready to make satisfaction.

But one crime leads to another, and Cain had become emboldened in evil ways, though certainly his next offence was not so grievous as his first. As we have said, the Nicobarese pay no taxes, and the only return they directly make towards the cost of the government of the island is to keep in tolerable repair a bridle-path connecting all the villages, whilst for their own sakes they would need only a footpath. As the people of Mus have an inordinate length of way in their township, whilst those of Kinmai have an extremely short length, it is arranged that the people of Kinmai shall help the people of Mus by keeping a portion of their path in order. So some fifty men and women, boys and girls, from Kinmai, were more or less busy in Mus township cutting down the jungle growth and clearing the path of rubbish that had accumulated during the rains. As it was very warm and close, and he was thirsty, old Cain told one of the girls to go up a palm and cut him some nuts. She hesitated, for she could hardly regard the party as travellers when they were not much more than half-a-mile away from home; so he said: "Be quick; go up and cut some nuts; these are my trees"—for it is no uncommon thing for one man to have trees in several townships. So the girl went up the tree and cut him what nuts he required. If he had not said, "These are my trees," no one would have minded much; but the owner of the trees much objected when he found that old Cain said that the trees were his. So he went to tell Offandi, who again called the assembly of elders (*kam-hô-ka*; in India known as *panchayet*), which determined that

though they had no precedent to go upon, this second offence should not be passed by. (By the idiom of the Nicobarese language the visiting Magistrate is also called *kam-hô-ka*, because he gives judgment as does the assembly of elders.) The Mus elders went in force to Kinmai, with many able-bodied attendants, and demanded that Cain should immediately pay the fine of a pig for each offence. He did this. They also forbade him to cross their land when he went fishing, whereby he would be debarred from using his canoe for a good part of the best fishing season. They also threatened that if there was any more thieving on the part of Cain they would come in greater force and cut down all the coco-palms that the village of Kinmai possessed. No doubt the tradition of the sanguinary conflict in the past between the two villages furnished heat to their minds and to their language.

However, the minds of the Mus elders were not at rest. Cain was a travelled man, and known to Government officials, having been for many years a servant to the former Magistrate in special charge of the Nicobars. He was also a shrewd man in many matters, and was the only Nicobarese that I have heard of who, before the mission was established, used herbs and drugs as medicines in the Western sense, for the relief of sickness and wounds. So Offandi and the other elders thought that Cain would be likely to try to cause mischief; and the traders are accused of endeavouring to fan any factions, in order to pose as the friends of one side, and get them to be their "friends" and clientele. The old Agent,



FRONT AND SIDE VIEWS OF OFFANDI AND JACK ROBINSON, TAKEN BY E. H. MAN, ESQ., ABOUT 1888.  
 Offandi, the head-man of Mus Village, died in 1922. Many of the older Nicobarese had English names frequently given them by the  
 British sailors who formerly came in briggs for "nuts."



who had left not long before, was not returning, I was going away, and no one knew who or what the new Agent might be, and so things looked promising for trouble, as the action of the Mus elders had no precedent in thus dealing with an offender who lived in another village.

So the elders of Mus came to me in a body, bringing all the parties and witnesses and many friends. They did not wish me to adjudicate on the matter, to admonish or to punish anyone. They merely wished me by investigation, questioning all parties, to find out exactly what the facts of the case were, and what action had been taken; and then I was to put on permanent record in the register which would always be kept at the Agency a full account of the case, for reference in case anyone should later on try to make trouble.

I was astonished at the intelligence displayed by Offandi and others, and readily acceded to their request, only warning them that they must not in any case cut down any of the palms belonging to Kinmai village, but they should bring any serious offender before the Agent and the Magistrate. They readily agreed to this, and also withdrew their inhibition of Cain fishing from Sawi Bay. I then harangued Cain on his wickedness, telling him that we expected Indians and Burmans to steal and to lie, but not the Nicobarese. I also spoke of him as an old man, setting such a bad example to the youth, and urged him to live more righteously for the remaining short time that could be left to him. There was no further trouble about that affair.

Thefts from the traders' shops are not unknown, though they are very few when one considers the opportunities for theft—for the shops are sometimes left for weeks together with no one in charge. Sometimes a dishonest shopman will lodge a complaint that his shop has been rifled in his absence. Old Offandi said of one such: "He sometimes speaks the truth." However, some of the less stable young men are tempted to steal nuts and to dispose of them to the traders, mainly, no doubt, in order to supply themselves with tobacco and other luxuries, but also partly from the spirit of adventure and daring. One day, accompanied by a number of people, the headman of Mus brought before me a sort of nephew of his, probably a cousin's son. He had for the second time been detected in stealing nuts, and had confessed his crime. On the former occasion he had been merely reprimanded; for the Nicobarese were always very gentle in their dealing with first offenders, unless the crime was a clear manifestation of a "bad" (cruel) disposition. For his second offence the Nicobarese elders wished to give him a flogging. They did not wish the case to be officially brought before the Magistrate on his visit. "We do not want to make a convict of the man," said old Offandi in English—a man who might often be seen in his house, or returning from work in his garden, clad only in a Nicobarese loin-cloth which might easily go into one's watch-pocket. Having made inquiries from the witnesses, and from the prisoner, who acknowledged his guilt, I told the elders that I thought their decision was the best possible one, and though I could not

authorize a flogging, by their own customs their own *kam-hô-ka* might lawfully inflict the penalty. I also added that I hoped they would give the man a good flogging with a stick not much more than half-an-inch thick; only they must take care in beating him not to injure him in any way, but only to give him some pain for the present and a little inconvenience for a day or two. All went away satisfied. I think the young man learnt his lesson; at any rate I never heard of his giving further trouble to the community.

"The sight to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done." The Chief Commissioner was very anxious that the shops should give money for nuts, and also that they should regularly stock sweets. He thought the latter idea would be very beneficial in developing a spirit of industry among the children. I told him that I did not at all like his suggestion about the sweets; though some of the shops sometimes actually had sweets on sale, and I myself had taken down as presents for the children a considerable amount of jaggery—an exceedingly sweet kind of sugar made in India and Burma by boiling down the sweet unfermented toddy juice. I felt that it was a dangerous thing to teach undisciplined children that they could get sweets and tobacco, whenever they liked, and as much as they liked, by taking a few nuts, wherever found, down to the shops. Indeed later on one had to try to bring pressure to prevent the shopmen from receiving nuts from children unless these were working along with adults.

The great flaw in the Nicobarese life and character is the very lax sexual morality, among the married



people as well as the unmarried, the women and girls as well as the men and boys. It could hardly be expected from people whose circumstances and natural temperament alike permit them to live the *dolce far niente* life that in the events of daily life they would normally take the heroic course, but rather the line of least resistance at the moment. The way, too, in which not only a whole family, but also men and women and children of several other families, sleep by day or night in one large dark room would in any case render family life (as we happily have known it) almost an impossibility. There is no assembling of all the members of one family round a common table; they do not even necessarily eat of food supplied from the same source. Then, again, though there is no necessary connection between scantiness of clothing and immorality, and indeed the *filles de joie* of Uganda are said to be much more careful about propriety of dress in public than are the honest coolie women of that land, yet when a youth and a girl in embracing one another experience naked body touching naked body it can only be expected, methinks, despite the motto, *honi soit qui mal y pense*, that the contact will culminate in sexual intercourse.

Yet it must not be supposed that the Nicobarese possess no moral instinct in such matters, as has been stated concerning certain African tribes. Many a wife who has found herself more frail than she had expected will voluntarily (and of her own initiative) in shame confess her misdeed to her husband. The husband too feels the disgrace—a wound to his honour and to his peace of mind, to say the least. A case is on

record of a leading man committing suicide because his wife stayed away one night in *el-panam* without his leave, and without being able to give any very satisfactory account of herself and her doings. In another case a man who found that his wife had committed adultery with an acquaintance of his went mad for the time. The adulterer made himself scarce, and the husband turned his destructive instinct on the posts of his own house, and then, leaving that before very much harm had been done, he went down to the beach to *el-panam* and destroyed the fine new racing canoe which belonged to the sept of which he was a prominent member; after that he had to be watched and guarded for several days lest he should commit suicide. Of course the adulterer did not belong to his sept—sexual intercourse in such a case is forbidden utterly; indeed it would be “an abomination.”

When cases of adultery come before the *kam-hô-ka* (or assembly of elders), which adjudicates upon all sorts of social matters whether festivals or crimes, there is a penalty inflicted, always a fine, and in some cases a flogging also. Not infrequently the fine of a pig is privately paid without the matter being brought up before the *kam-hô-ka*. In the above-mentioned case the penalty was a fine of the estimated value of the destroyed canoe, which would mean the loss to the adulterer of most of his coco-palm plantations. There are of course some utterly degraded men who are not unwilling to live on the prostitution of their wives; and in one case, in an outlying village, there was on petition a refusal to fine a trader who had committed

adultery with a married woman to whom he had previously made a present of cloth, as it was found out that she had been in the habit of selling her body, and then the husband (who knew all about the arrangements) also sued for fines. It is said that in former times death was the penalty for adultery, but that this was found to cause such a decrease in the population that a fine was substituted for the extreme penalty (*Census Report* of 1901). We can only, however, regard this as one of the less reliable of pious traditions.

Divorce is freely permitted, and where there are no children this is effected simply by mutual consent. Where there are children it is a matter for arbitration.

In some cases the wife cares little about the occasional infidelity of her husband, if it was "only play," and he has no affection for the other party, though this would not normally be the case. Of the Central Islands, Mr Lowis reports that he thinks the married women are less faithful than their husbands, and that among them (and probably in Chowra, where the population is steadily diminishing) abortion is frequent. I am glad to think that the state of affairs in Car Nicobar is not so bad as that.

The Nicobarese are very sensitive of slander, or indeed of being ridiculed. If one makes fun of an elder, it is quite a sufficiently weighty matter for the discussion of the *kam-hô-ka*. If a man should be called by another a brainless fool, he would be able to find no rest (for weeks it might be) unless the *kam-hô-ka* should do him "justice," or perhaps only satisfy his wounded vanity, by fining his reviler a

pig. The pig would be killed and a portion of pork sent round to all their neighbours with the intimation that the two parties were now good friends again; and the complainant and the defendant would eat together off the same plate—or more strictly from the same piece of *ra-foh* (the spathe of the betel-nut flower), for in such matters there is naturally a reversion to ancient custom, and European enamelled soup-plates would not be used, as they generally are now in ordinary life. I have known a well-to-do elder object somewhat, saying privately to his friends that he had spoken only the truth; but for the peace of the village he agreed to satisfy the wishes of the complainant, who was himself a rich man, and who threatened to withdraw himself and all his people from the communal life of the village unless an expiation was made for the offence committed against him.

Reference has been made to the strange Nicobarese custom for angry men to inflict loss on themselves, but probably it is done with the underlying idea that their action will work homœopathically, and bring loss to the person on account of whose offence the act is done. The destruction of a man's own property, and the mad hacking at the posts of his own house, might perhaps be compared to the action of the violent drunken man of our Western slums who goes home and destroys his own crockery and chairs—but this mad work may be done to annoy his wife, with whom he is apt to have some altercation.

“Thus setting fire to one's own hut and property is one way of showing shame or disgust at the misconduct of relatives and friends; and Offandi, the chief of Mus

in Car Nicobar, once attempted to dig up his father's bones before the lawful Ossuary Feast, and to throw them into the sea, because an important villager had called his father a liar" (*Census Report*, 1901). I presume that the underlying idea would be that Offandi's father's spirit would then be roving about, and active in vengeance on the slanderer.

Two elders of one of the eastern villages had some altercation, not proceeding to blows. One of them in anger at being "bested" in the dispute took up a *dah* (or chopper) and chopped off two fingers of his own left hand. Another similar case also came directly to my notice in August 1917. A young man, a native of one of the more distant villages, had been stealing, not for the first time, and was brought before the Agent and sentenced to work as a kind of serf at the Agency for twelve months. As such he would have to make himself useful, and to do any work the Agent should set him to do, whilst the Agent would have to feed and clothe him. The man had not a very strenuous time of it, and wandering off one day for a few hours on his own account, he went to the traders' quarters of a neighbouring village and there stole a belt. He was detected before he got away, and a crowd of Nicobarese and traders very quickly assembled, everybody coming to see what the noise was about. Suddenly the man, who had been squatting on the ground, jumped up, and seizing a *dah* (chopper) which was lying there he chopped right off the thumb of his left hand. He was brought to the mission, and the catechist schoolmaster washed the wound, put on antiseptics and bound up his hand. The man came every day for treatment, and in two or three weeks

the wound was quite healed. I was anxious to know what the man's own explanation of his conduct was. He replied that the beating he was sure to get when he got back to the Agency would be so heavy that he could not endure the thought of it, and so to show his annoyance and detestation he had chopped off his own thumb! Surely this was a case of cutting off one's nose to spite one's face!

Naturally with a people of this primitive type of character "out of sight" generally means "out of mind." Great grief may be felt by the Nicobarese at the time for the loss of someone dear to them; but very soon the dead are forgotten. A man who had lived very happily with his wife may be married again within a week or two of his being freed from the restrictions that affect the "unclean." They are indeed a child race, with the animal instincts of adults. Whilst they have many of the characteristics that endear the child to everyone who is not inhuman, one cannot but feel how much more lovable, or at least tolerable, are the ordinary child-like and childish actions when met with in the child than in the physically grown person.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE LANGUAGE

**T**HE Nicobarese are a Mongolian people who in prehistoric days passed over to the islands from the opposite shores of Burma (or more strictly the land of the Talaings) or from Malaya; and their language, which is now broken up into six widely differing dialects, has (as Sir Richard Temple has pointed out) "affinities with the Indo-Chinese languages, as represented nowadays by the Mon Language of Pegu and Annam, and the Khmer Language of Cambodia, amongst civilized peoples, and by the languages of a number of uncivilized tribes in the Malay Peninsula and Indo-China."

The range of vowels is exceptionally wide in the Car Nicobarese language; their consonants are much more limited, as they have no *b*, *d*, *g* or *z*, and no double consonants excepting *ch* and a final *nt*; *ng* and *ny* cannot be counted as compound consonants though written in English as two letters. The Nicobarese, however, have two *r*'s; and their final *k* and *n* are found both clipped in sound (as in Burmese) and full (as in English) —of course in different words.

"The Nicobarese speech is slurred and indistinct; but there is no abnormal dependence on tone, accent or gesture to make the meaning clear. The dialects are, as might be expected, rich in specialized words for actions and concrete ideas, but poor in generic . . .

terms. . . . The language bears every sign of a very long continuous growth, both of syntax and etymology; and is clearly the outcome of a strong intelligence applied to its development. Considering that it is unwritten, and but little affected by foreign tongues, and so has not had extraneous assistance in its growth, it is a remarkable product of the human mind" (*Census Report* of 1901). The Nicobarese language has no tones, in the sense in which the Burmese, Shan and Chinese languages possess them.

It is an agglutinative language (as is Turkish, and also Finnish), and each syllable generally embodies a separate root, or an affix which might almost be regarded as a separate word. In writing and printing the language the different syllables of a word are joined (or disjoined) by hyphens; and this has been found most helpful not only in the discrimination of vowels and diphthongs, but also as enabling one to see at a glance the various component parts of a word. It is often extremely difficult to know how to divide up an expression into words, and in many cases the judgment given can be regarded as only tentative.

Many prefixes and infixes are used in Car Nicobarese, and a bewildering number of suffixes, though in most cases the learner can soon perceive the special force of the affix. Often the same affix, with the same significance (as a Nicobarese person would say), may be used with the most diverse kinds of words—*e.g.* with a noun and verb, and sometimes also with adverbs and prepositions (or post-positions, rather). Indeed words cannot be divided up into so many parts of speech as in Aryan languages. The same word *hol*



is equivalent to the preposition "with" or the noun "friend," "companion"; the word *hòñ* is the verb "to wish," or the conjunction "in order that." Again, verbs as we understand the term are not necessary to form a complete sentence—a full expression of some thought. We English people have many such expressions, as "Hands off!" "Well done!" "Quite so," "What next?" "Nonsense," "Oh, dear me!" But we should expound most of these as elliptical expressions; and if we wished to analyse them as sentences we should supply certain words as understood; or in some cases we might class the whole as compound interjections. Now in Nicobarese talk this kind of sentence is almost the rule, and often there are no words in the language that could be supplied if we assumed an ellipsis. Again, many of the most common Nicobarese words have, I imagine, no one equivalent in any other language; as, for example, the word *ngaich*, which may mean "yes," or "the work is finished"; or it may form a kind of introductory word to a sentence, something like "and"; or it may add emphasis to some verb.

The order of words in a sentence is a most complex matter. In some few cases words can be rearranged in a different order without destroying the sense; but generally the least change in order demands almost a kaleidoscopic change of the words, including a different form of the verbal root and a different form of the pronoun. *Chin*, "I," may never begin a sentence; but its equivalent *chu-ò* may; and similarly of other words.

The language is sadly lacking in means whereby to

express simply and suitably many words in common use among us; and even some entities perfectly recognized by themselves have no proper names. There is no simple and regular equivalent for "to have" or "to be" (whether as auxiliary or as notional verbs); for "to become," "to do," "ought," "must," "dare," "seem," "hope," "despair," "need," "use," "abuse," "meddle," "moan," "starve," "punish," "condemn," "offer," "provide," "argue," "persuade," "excuse," "propose," "decide," "determine," "advise," "thank," "praise"; or for "necessary," "miserable," "honourable," "shy," "reserved," "sulky"; or for "age," "manners," "character," etc., etc. It is perhaps not to be wondered at that the number of their adjectives and nouns which mark the colour of things or the moral qualities of persons is exceedingly small; and naturally many words of very common use among more civilized peoples, especially such as deal with social life, have no equivalents in their language. Their primitive mode of life never necessitated the manufacture of names for such things as "rent," "rates" and "taxes," "king," "government," "field," "farm," "farmer," "occupation," "freedom," "liberty," "crime," "acquittal," "punishment."

The Nicobarese people also lack powers of synthesis, and so have few generic terms. Thus they have no name for "village" or "township," or for "island"; whilst *mak* has to serve for "well," "stream," "pond," as well as for "fresh water"; for "animal" one must say either *che-he-chōn*, "a bird," or *tō-ŕeū-la*, "a creeping thing." There is no word for "palm-tree," though there are words for all the different kinds of palm;

nor for "flower," or "grass," or "shell-fish." *Chōn* has to do duty for "grass," "plant," "tree," "stick," "rubbish"; *ta-rik* has to do duty for "man," though it properly means a native of Car Nicobar; whilst Nicobarese from the other islands are *ta-ðð*, and other foreigners *ta-ðiny*.

The language is, however, rich in its power to form, in a more or less uniform manner, derivative nouns (which, however, may be used without further modification as finite verbs) from almost any verbal stem; thus, for example, from *kūich*, "to write" (but primarily "to mark with the point of a *dah*, or big knife"), we get *ka-mūich*, "a writer"; *ka-hūich*, "what is written"; *ka-nūich*, "a pen or pencil"; *ki-nūich-ngö*, "the writing"; *iv-kū-chö*, "a manuscript."

The Car Nicobarese have at least seven words to express the different stages or conditions of the coconut; and nearly every little concrete thing with which they have to deal, or about which they have to think, has its own particular name, with an independent root; whilst actions essentially the same are often expressed by totally different words.

Again, the range of verbal and other suffixes is astonishingly wide. Thus the affixes *-ö*, *-en*, *-kö*, *-ken* seem to signify little, only the verb generally becomes transitive; *-lö*, *-len*, *-il*, *-al*, *-öl*, *-öl* generally denote that the action is upwards, or to one's left as one faces the sea; *-tö*, *-ten*, *-ti* generally mark an action that is downwards, or to one's right as one faces the sea; *-nyö*, *-nyen*, *-eny*, *-iny*, *-uny* denote that the action is outwards; *-ngö*, *-ngen*, *-ung*, *-ěng*, *-eng*, *-ing* denote that the action is directed away, or to someone's loss; *-höt*

shows that the action is directed into something. *Ha-ka* and *tö-hech* mark an action that is continuous or progressing; whilst *-tam*, *-hang*, *-ha-nga*, *-hëiny*, *-höł*, *-hö-ti* imply that something else follows on the action expressed by the verb to which these are affixed. There seems to be generally no difference in meaning between the affixes *-ö* and *-en* (including *-tö* and *-ten*, *-ngö* and *-ngen*, etc.); but as to usage, the form in *-en* always seems to be used when the object is a personal pronoun (this object follows the verb, and is pronounced in such close connection with the verb that if sound only were taken into account it would be reckoned as forming one word with the verb).

The causative affix *ha-* or *a-* will turn a noun into a verb, or an intransitive into a transitive verb—e.g. *ha-pi-hö*, “to marry” (*pi-hö*, “husband or wife”); *ha-uk*, “to thatch” (*uk*, “back,” “roof”); *ha-löök-lö-re*, “to purify oneself” (*löök*, “to be good”); *ha-meuk-tö-re*, “to show” (*meuk*, “to see”).

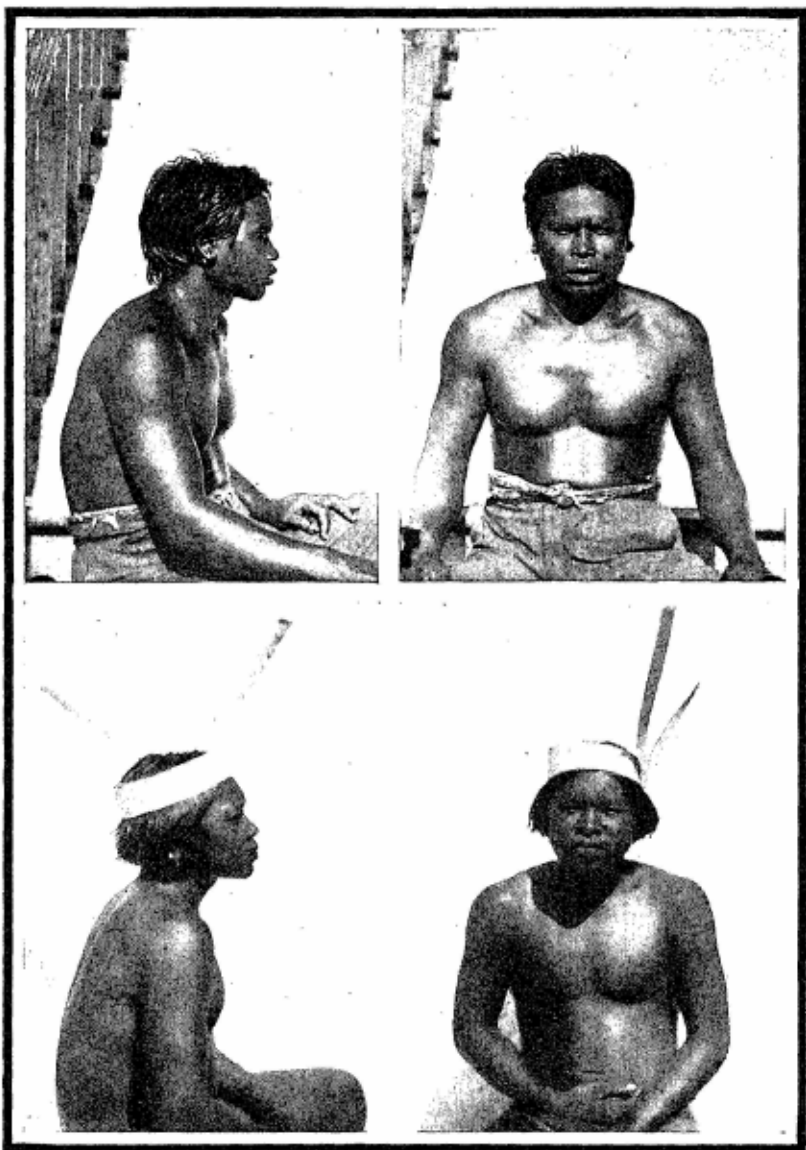
Adjectives are formed from verbal roots by prefixing *tö-*, but the same word may be a noun also—e.g. *kööl*, “to be forbidden,” “to be sinful”; *tö-kööl*, “wicked,” but also “sins,” “abominable deeds” (*ka-nööl-lö fā-len*), and also “sinners.” The wrong part of speech (as it seems to the European who is beginning his studies in the language) is very frequently used by the Nicobarese even when they have a simpler form from the same root, of the right kind of speech.

There are two affixes which especially deserve notice, the reflexive *-re*, and the form *-u* or *-v* which denotes that something is possessed by someone. (By the way, one may note that affixes, co-ordinate or otherwise,

are often joined together.) These affixes are used equally with nouns and verbs, and are also found with adverbs and prepositions. As used with nouns the affix *-u* or *-v* or *-vō* obviates the difficulty that there is no word in Nicobarese equivalent to "to have" or "to be," whilst with verbs it has the force of turning the active into the passive voice—e.g. *ta-ō-ku chin*, "I have some coco-palms" (*ta-ō-kō*, "a coco-palm"); *fē-lu a-nga-añ*, "he had a *dah*, chopper" (*fēl*, "a *dah*"); *vē-nyu nang chin*, "I was told" (*ve-eny nang*, "to tell [the ear]"); *ōt ī-nu*, "there is nothing in it" (*in*, "in"; *in e*, "in it"); *ōt ta-ri-ku*, "there is no one" (*ta-rik*, "a man," or more strictly a native of Car Nicobar); *ōt rōō-nu-vō*, "there were no footprints"; (*rōōn*, "foot," "foot-print"); *ōt tō-ōv a-nga-añ*, "he never spoke" (*tō*, "a word"); *nō rō-ōv*, "and it was not there" (*rōō*, "no," "not"); *i pa-tī-re chin*, "I live in my own house" (*pa-tī*, "house"; the verb *i-yōng*, "to live," could not be used in such a sentence, it is neither expressed nor understood); *kum-re*, "one's load"; *heu-heu-re*, "to rest"; *ha-yōng-len-re*, "to trust"; *in-re*, "among themselves" (from the preposition *in*, the same word as above, *i pa-tī-re chin*).

There are only some dozen words in the language which mark the sex of the person or animal spoken of, and one can mark the sex of the parent or child only by adding male or female after the noun of common gender.

There is no inflection for number in nouns, but the number can be marked by the use of the appropriate demonstrative adjective. The tense of verbs is sometimes sufficiently marked by the context, but the particle



A SIDE AND FRONT VIEW OF OFFANDI IN HIS EARLY MANHOOD.

He was one of the most shrewd of the Nicobarese, and a good friend of the English, and a wise adviser of his own people.

SIDE AND FRONT VIEW OF ANOTHER NICOBARESE YOUTH.

These views shew that the physiognomy of the Nicobarese proves them to belong to the Thibeto-Burman group of nations. The *quasi*-turban, made of a strip of the spathe of the areca palm, is much affected by young men.



*min* (which is not an affix, but a separate word, often separated from the verb by one or more intervening words) is used to mark the future, and the affix *hē* or the particle *ngaich* (which may come either before or after the verb, according to the construction of the sentence) may be used to denote that the action is finished or refers to the past.

Apart from the formation of new words, strictly speaking there is no inflection in the Nicobarese language (beyond a few phonal changes), except in the case of pronouns and pronominal (or demonstrative) adjectives, and here we have excess, to counterbalance (one might think) the absence elsewhere. As for the adjectives and pronouns "this" and "that," there is no such distinction between these words in Nicobarese as seems so natural to us; but there are three forms, one denoting that the person or thing is present visibly before one, another that it is not here, whilst a third form marks that the person or thing is not here now, but was some time ago. They have also a special form to mark that something is very near to one. Then with reference to *persons* there are three numbers—singular, dual and plural—and the personal form is different from the impersonal form (used of things), with the qualification that *in the singular number* animals, plants, boats, knives and some other things are regarded as personal—*i.e.* the personal form of pronoun or demonstrative adjective is used with such names. Again there are distinctive forms for "we" (dual or plural, in all the cases), to show whether the person spoken to is included or not—a most useful distinction.



There are three cases in pronouns, for which I have used the names of nominative, interrogative and oblique, as in *normal simple sentences* the nominative is used as the subject of the affirmative verb, and the interrogative form is used as the subject of the verb in questions, whilst the oblique case is generally used where we should use the objective or possessive. But the names are very unsatisfactory, though they seem to me to be better than "first, second and third cases," which are the only tolerable alternative names that have occurred to me.

Like many of the Far Eastern languages, the Nicobarese has numeral coefficients; but whilst in the Burmese language the order is noun, numeral, coefficient, and in the Chin language it is noun, coefficient, numeral, in the Car Nicobarese language it is numeral, coefficient, noun—e.g. *nēt ta-ka ta-rik*, "two men." In Nicobarese, however, the use of the coefficient is not so imperatively necessary as in Burmese; and the coefficient is also used in other cases, as after *ām?*—"how many?"

Despite the way in which words in the Nicobarese language are built up syllable upon syllable, by prefix, infix and suffix (often many of them in the same word) the etymology of the language seems to be the merest child's-play in comparison with the syntax, which is so utterly different from that of any other language with which one has even a nodding acquaintance. For instance, in Car Nicobarese, pronouns in apposition are rarely, if ever, in the same case. Or again, change of subject for the different verbs in a sentence, and change from the active to the passive form (or *vice*

*versa*), or from the simple form of the verb to one of the substantive forms, is often desirable.

About the rules of prosody, which regulate the versification of their songs, I cannot give much enlightenment. They do not use rhyme or alliteration; and words are often slurred together, even much more than in ordinary conversation. I generally find the songs quite unintelligible. If one gets a translation of the song, one still needs a commentary to make the meaning at all clear; as, if it avoids the obscene, it gets on to ancient folk-lore, much of which is already obsolescent among the present generation of the people.

#### MISSION WORK

The writer cannot conclude this book without some reference to mission work among the people, though it is indeed still "a day of small things."

The French Jesuits, Faure and Taillandier, were labouring in Great Nicobar in 1711, and their letters home were published in the *Lettres Edifiantes*; and there had been others, "fryers," before them, who are referred to by Dampier in 1688. Unhappily they were not assisted or supplied with any luxuries or even necessities from home, and soon perished in great privations. At the beginning of the nineteenth century an Italian priest from Rangoon made a short stay in the islands; and from 1835 onwards some French Jesuits were labouring in Car Nicobar, Chowra and Teressa, until they disappeared in 1846.

The most determined efforts were, however, made by the Danish and Austrian Moravian missionaries,

who had their headquarters on the shores of the magnificent Nancowry Harbour. But they chose a most pestilentially malarious site, infested with the mosquito *anopheles*; and they also attempted to live without supplies from abroad. Out of twenty-five men who were working there between 1768 and 1787, of whom some were on the island for only a few days, and others for as long as seven years, thirteen died at Nancowry, and eleven at Tranquebar shortly after they had returned thither in the hope of recruiting their health and strength. In 1790 and in 1804 fresh attempts were made by isolated Moravian missionaries, but they were not able to establish themselves. In 1831 the Danish pastor Rosen from Tranquebar again tried to colonize and Christianize the islands, but, lacking all support, he retired in 1834, and by 1837 his colony had disappeared, the Danes officially giving up their rights in the place. A translation of twenty-seven chapters of St Matthew's Gospel into the Nancowry dialect had been made by the Moravian missionaries before the year 1787, and was published from the manuscript at Herrnhut by the British and Foreign Bible Society, under the supervision of Mr De Roepstorff, some forty years ago.

Since 1886, when Mr Solomon, who had worked with credit for many years among the native Andamanese and the Christian convicts at Port Blair, was sent down in the dual capacity of Agent of the Government and catechist and schoolmaster in mission employ, the Church of England has had a small mission school in Car Nicobar in charge of South

Indian and Nicobarese catechists; and from time to time there have been English clergy living on the island and working among the people. In 1912 the language was successfully reduced to writing, mainly by reason of the assistance which John Richardson, the Nicobarese catechist and school teacher, was able to give; and in the following year a primer (containing spelling-book, and simple religious instruction, and prayers) and also the Gospel of St Luke were printed in the Car Nicobarese language, and in 1914 an abridged edition of the Book of Common Prayer. A most careful revision of the method of transliteration was afterwards made, and in 1918 there was issued a revised Car Nicobarese spelling and reading book, containing a number of Western fables and stories, and two or three of the Car Nicobarese folk-tales; there was also issued in the same year the Gospel of St Mark, in the revised spelling. The Gospels of St Matthew and St John, the Acts of the Apostles and the Liturgical Epistles also exist in manuscript in two copies, as well as other matter. The Gospels of St Luke and St Mark were published at the cost of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

The difficulty of the task of the missionary to the Car Nicobarese does not in the least lie in any supposed lack of power on the part of the Nicobarese mind to comprehend the spirit of the Christian faith, which indeed has something answering to it in all minds which have not become twisted into unnatural ways of thought and life. The sight of the star-lit heavens, and the force of the categorical imperative addressed to the individual conscience, appeal alike to

the naked barbarian of a tropical islet and to the greatest of German philosophers; *testimonium animæ naturaliter Christianæ*, as Tertullian of old called it. The trouble with the Nicobarese, as with us, consists not so much in the difficulty of perceiving the right way, as of continuing steadily in it, when one does see it; and certainly their lapses are far more excusable than our own.

At the present time there is in the press a rather extensive *Grammar and Dictionary of the Car Nicobarese Language*, compiled by the author of this work. It is being printed by the American Baptist Mission Press in Rangoon, partly at the cost of the Indian Government (Andaman and Nicobar Islands).

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### FOLK-TALES OF THE CAR NICOBARESE

Collected by the Rev. G. WHITEHEAD, with a Prefatory Note by  
Sir R. C. TEMPLE

*Reprinted from "The Indian Antiquary"*

[The following folk-tales communicated by Car Nicobarese children are of special value to the folk-lore student. In several cases they follow a track widely different from the usual legends, and where they deal with well-worn stories they present them in a hitherto unknown and varied garb.

The tales, so Mr Whitehead informs me, are all familiar to the Car Nicobarese, and most of the matter has been taken from school children's essays. Where necessary, footnotes have been added by Mr Whitehead or myself to elucidate the text.—R. C. T.]

#### I.—THE DELUGE

There was once a great flood in this land, and all the surface of the earth was covered with water.

Now there was one man who was fortunate enough to swim to a great tree which was not entirely immersed in the water. He climbed the tree and lived up in the branches of it until the waters were assuaged.

When he saw any coco-nuts floating about in the water, or any dead pigs and fowls with distended stomachs, he would swim out to them and bring them in; and there up among the branches of the tree he would eat his food.

At last the rain stopped; and then, little by little, the water decreased; and little by little he got more room, and at last was able to get down to the solid earth.

Then, when the waters had gone down, he spied a bitch perched up on the branches of a tree, its ear being spiked by the great thorn of the *kun-hiün* (prickly palm). So he went and released it, and took it, and made it his wife; and they lived together, the bitch and the man; and they had offspring which was human.

So the people of these parts copy the dog in wearing the *ki-sát*,<sup>1</sup> for it has tails hanging down like a dog's tail; their turban<sup>2</sup> too has ears standing up like the dog's ears. The people also say of themselves that they are the offspring of that bitch.<sup>3</sup>

## II.—THE METAMORPHOSES OF THE SUN AND MOON

Long, long ago when the world was new and the skies were still low down and near to the earth, the moon was changed<sup>4</sup> into the sun. The sun too was changed into the moon, and<sup>5</sup> the heat was terrific, so that boards cracked and the ground was cleft asunder.

So one day the ancients who dwelt in these lands of ours met together to take counsel as to what was to be done. As a result of their deliberations, they directed the fletchers to make some long-bows, and they prepared arrows of *ta-chöi*<sup>6</sup> and of *cha-lüök*.<sup>7</sup>

Then they shot at the sky until the sky removed a long way off.

Some of the arrows they shot up at the sky never came down again, but remained stuck up in the sky. Those made of the strands of the coco-nut leaf burst into flame and became stars. Those made of *ta-chöi* sticks did not burst into flame.

## III.—ABOUT TREES IN DAYS OF YORE

Long, long ago, when this world of ours was young, trees would be obedient to men, and go wherever they were told. People could drive them far away from their original place.

So in the days when the trees were obedient to the commands of men, we did not get wearied when we travelled, for we would fasten our loads on the branch of a tree, letting the load hang down, duly balanced; and then we would drive the trees along.

So too when we wanted to bring in our things from the gardens in the jungle, all we had to do was to put the load in balanced quantities on the branches of a tree; and the tree would of itself take them off to the village.

In those days, too, people who could not walk could get up into a tree, and they would be borne safely to their homes or where they wished to go, whilst quietly sitting on the branches of the tree.

Now there was once quite a large number of people going out into the jungle at the same time, and also coming back to *el-panam*.<sup>8</sup> Their loads were heavy and the distance great, so that their strength was somewhat overtaxed. So they packed their loads on the branches of the trees and drove the trees along. But as the trees were going along, the people who were behind went into fits of laughter at the comical sight of seeing the trees carrying their loads and bumping up one against the other. So the trees turned stubborn and would not move any more, for they were angry at being laughed at. So nowadays we have often to overtax our strength in carrying our own loads when we travel, because trees have now become fixtures.



## IV.—THE PIXIES

Once upon a time the people of Malacca<sup>9</sup> used to go down to the underworld through a narrow passage. It was dark in the passage, so they needed coco-nut-leaf torches.

Down there, lying on the soft grass, they found lots of eggs belonging to the "little folks" who lived down there. Every time they went down, the people of Malacca would steal these eggs.

On one occasion they came across the "little folks" and said to them, "Where are your parents?" "We are the old folks," was the answer. Then the people of the upper world (from Malacca) challenged the "little folks" to a dancing competition; and the pixies did not come off second best.

But the people of the upper world were never able after that occasion to go down there again and to steal the eggs; for the pixies blocked the way with the spathe of betel-nut, which turned into stone.

They never come back again nowadays,<sup>10</sup> for there is no road.

V.—THE ORIGIN OF THE LITTLE ONE<sup>11</sup>

Long ago there used to be a small island off the headland at Kakana,<sup>12</sup> and a *sa-kā*<sup>13</sup> thought it would steal the island and have it for its own place. So in the night, when there was no one to see it, the little bird picked up the island and made off with it.

The bird was not able to go quickly, for the island was a heavy load; and whilst she was still on her way the day began to dawn; and as the bird did not wish people to see her in the act of thieving, she dropped the island anywhere and anyhow; and through her

haste it fell wrong side up. However, she left it as it was and did not trouble to put things straight, as in any case it was not worth very much.

So that island—it is called the “Little One”—remains there, and serves as a guide-post to us when we go in our canoes to Chowra.

## VI.—ON THE ORIGIN OF BATS

Long, long ago, when there were still no bats in this land, a ship came here from some foreign country or other. It sailed straight for Arong<sup>14</sup> and there it was wrecked, on account of the stormy seas and high winds. The ship was cast up on the sands, and broken in pieces by the waves.

All the poor foreigners suffered greatly, and only a few of them were able to swim to the shore of our land. These went inland and struck the “forbidden” land<sup>15</sup> in their search for food.

They were Coringhees,<sup>16</sup> and their clothing was all tattered and torn. They were amusing themselves by swinging on the boughs of trees and hanging down from the branches by their arms, when they were all turned into bats. Big people were turned into the big variety of bat (the flying-fox); people not so big as they into the medium-sized bat; and small children into the small variety of bat; and they still hang down by their arms from the branches of the trees.

There were no bats here before that.

## VII.—ON THE ORIGIN OF SHARKS

Once upon a time, in the olden days, there were some very wicked people who used to live between Tamalu and Pöökö,<sup>17</sup> at a place which does not exist

now, but was then called Tarûlö. Those people were barbarous savages and used to bewitch folk.

So the other people rose up against them, and slew a number of them; and the remnant fled to our side of the island to a place then named Chûökvök, which is not far from Titöp<sup>18</sup>; and there they built houses for themselves. These savages thought nothing of killing a person; they would often kill a stranger on sight.

Now it happened that two children were going to *el-panam*,<sup>19</sup> and the elder was carrying his young brother on his shoulders. They did not notice that there was a man coming up behind them with a sharp spear in his hand.

That man hurried up stealthily and stabbed the little fellow in the rump; whereupon he cried out: "Oh! I am hurt."

So the elder brother said to the stranger: "Please do not tease the little man and make him wriggle about, for he will be falling down." He did not know that his brother had been stabbed behind. He thought the man was merely tickling the child; but he had stabbed him.

Again the man stabbed the child, this time under the armpit; and the blood gushed out, and the child fell down dead.

Then, at last, the elder brother realized that the child had been stabbed; and he ran off as fast as he could, leaving the dead child, for he was afraid of those people; and he told his parents what had happened.

So the people held a council, and decided to slaughter all those savages. They attacked them, and most of them were killed; but some swam out into the deep sea and were turned into a very voracious kind of shark. So these sharks will always eat human beings, if they can get at them, in the sea.

## VIII.—THE CRUEL MOTHER

Once upon a time there was a man and his wife who had three children. One day the man wanted to go to spear fish, and he spoke to his wife, and said: "Tell the children to be on the look-out for my coming back and to gather coco-nut shells for firing to roast the fish that I hope to catch."

So she bade the children do what her husband had said; and they collected the coco-nut shells, carrying them in their arms.

The woman then took a razor and rubbed it and made it sharp. After that she told the children to make a fire; and when they had made the fire, she called her eldest son to come to her, saying: "Come, and I will shave your head."

He did not know that his mother wanted to cut off his head; so he came and she began to shave his head, when, gash! and she had cut his head off.

She next called the second son and did the same to him; and then she threw their heads into the fire and burnt them.

After that she called her youngest child, but he answered: "No! No! I am not coming, for you will do to me as you have done to my two brothers."<sup>20</sup>

Then said the mother: "No, I would not like you to fare like them, for you are the one that bites up and partially chews the betel-nut for me. You are my favourite child." But she was only enticing the child to come to her, and then she cut off his head too.

When the father came back, he said to his wife: "Where are the children?"

"I don't know," she said. "Perhaps they are playing among the *ta-chöi* bushes."

The father called the children, but there was no answer.

Again he said to his wife: "Where are the children?"

She replied: "Perhaps they have gone to fetch water; I do not know. Perhaps they are hiding behind the boxes."

The man did not find his children.

Now her husband was hungry, so the woman told him to get his food out of the basket that was hung up (as usual) near the fire-place. So he had his breakfast.

When he had finished eating, his wife said to him: "Well! it is the palms of your children's hands that you have been eating"; and she uttered the cry of the sea-eagle, "Añk! Añk! Añk!" and flew away as an eagle. The man leaned back against the walls of his house and wept, and beat his head against the wall. He was turned into an owl, and never ceases to bewail his sorrows. His wife was turned into a sea-eagle, and she never ceases catching fish.

#### IX.—WHEN THE WORLD WAS YOUNG

##### *The Story of Töt-ta-rong*

Long ago, in the days of yore, there was a man, Töt-ta-rong by name, who was violently in love with a beautiful damsel, and anxious by all means to get her for his wife. Time after time he would come to her to speak with her and to urge his request, but the girl simply did not care in the least for Töt-ta-rong.

Töt-ta-rong did not know what to do, for the girl always gave him a persistent and most emphatic "No!" So he was utterly miserable, and felt inclined to commit suicide on account of his grief.

Now it happened to be the time of the great Ossuary Feast<sup>21</sup> in his village, and great crowds of people had come in from the other villages for the occasion. It had got on towards midnight in the bright

moonlight; and the people were coming in from their gardens in the jungle, and were carrying round the pigs which were to be killed for food at the feast.

Töt-ta-rong went round too, and saw the people carrying the pigs—a merry crowd and a pleasant sight, sufficient (one would have thought) to banish sorrow from any heart. But Töt-ta-rong found no pleasure in what he saw. On the contrary, he hated it all on account of his grief, and he could not endure it.

There was none among his friends either to comfort him; for they were one and all busy, seeing to the comforts of their numerous guests.

He felt that he must do something to assuage his sorrow on account of that woman; he would kill himself and thereby perhaps work out her death too.

"However," he thought to himself, "I will go to that woman once more and try to win her. I will speak my final words to her." So he went and spoke to her once more, but she never deigned to answer him a word.

After he had considered his course of action, he went home and took a long *dah* (or sword), and forthwith went out into the jungle. His intention was to cleave asunder the island, in the north-west portion of it, the part where the lady dwelt and where all that crowd of feasters were.

So he went on until he came to "Cleft Hill."<sup>22</sup> He got up on a rock in the midst of where the dancers were; for, owing to the great numbers of guests, there was dancing going on in all the somewhat scattered groups of houses round about. Then Töt-ta-rong drew his sword and tried to cleave the earth with it. But the earth did not part asunder when he marked it with the point of the sword.

So he took a piece of *ta-chöi* wood<sup>23</sup>; this he fashioned like a *dah* (a sword or chopper); and then when he had marked the ground with the point of it

immediately the earth rent asunder at his feet—from “Cleft Hill” even to “Deep.”<sup>24</sup>

When the ground was being thus cleft asunder, Töt-ta-rong was in two minds as to where he would like to be—he would like to remain in the land where he was, and he would like to be on the part which was moving off elsewhere. Ultimately he decided to go away with the part of the island that was being rent off. But already there was a chasm formed, and when Töt-ta-rong tried to jump it he slipped and fell.

Meanwhile the portion of land that was moving away thought better of it, and decided to come back again, and join on to the main part of the island as before; and so Töt-ta-rong got crushed between the rocks.

When the severed portion of the land saw the blood of Töt-ta-rong, it felt hysterically sick at the sight, and in disgust again moved off and became Little Andaman Island; at least so say some travelled Nicobarese.<sup>25</sup> The body of poor Töt-ta-rong was turned into a rock, and strewed on the beach lies his hair, which the uninitiated think to be the decaying fallen leaves of the *casuarina* pine.

Meanwhile the cleaving of the ground was going on, right up to the place whence the sound of the revelling came; and then and there friends and lovers, husbands and wives, parents and children, were being parted asunder for ever; for some were on the land which remained here, and some on that which moved away.

Those left here had no relics of their friends, nothing to remind them of the dear ones who had been carried off. So they picked up the empty nuts which their friends had drunk, and put them in boxes and stowed them carefully away; and every now and then they

would open the boxes and take out the empty nuts, and kiss them, and then put them back again in sorrowful remembrance of the dear ones departed.

## X.—A VOYAGE TO THE MOON

There was once a widow who had four children. Three of them were grown up to be quite big girls, but the youngest was a baby; its name was Tö-mi-röök. The names of the others were Tö-kën ("Industrious"), the eldest; Tö-pêt-ngen ("One who minds one's own business"), the second; and Va-mî-rô ("Story-teller"), the third—all girls.

Now they had a small garden at some distance from the house, and one day the children were sent by their mother to go and weed it. She herself could not go with them, as there was no one else to mind the baby.

Early in the morning "Industrious" and her two sisters set out for the garden, and when they got there, at once set about to begin the weeding.

But soon the sun got up and it began to get hot, and "Story-teller" got tired and went into the shade to rest. Then she began to sing and to climb up on the boughs of trees (some of which had been chopped down and were lying full length on the ground). There she played and amused herself by swinging and did no more work for the rest of the day. This was the mother's favourite.

The two elder girls kept hard at their work out in the sun, and got very much sunburnt. "Va-mî-rô, please do come and help us, so that we may get the weeding finished," said Tö-kën to her. But the request was in vain, for Va-mî-rô simply would not do any work.

Then said Tö-pêt-ngen ("One who minded her own business"): "We will tell mother about you



when we get home, so that you will get a whipping." But Va-mî-rô would not budge, and did not say anything in reply.

When it got well on in the afternoon, Va-mî-rô began to sprinkle rubbish on her head, and then went home before the others, and said to her mother: "I have been the only one to do any work to-day; those other two did nothing but play the whole time. I left them now in the garden, still in the midst of their games."

The mother got extremely angered against the others when she heard "Story-teller's" account of them, and she said: "Wait till they come and I will teach them a lesson. You have your dinner now, for you are tired. You will find it on the shelf."

Then, after a while, the two elder girls came home, and they felt disappointed that there was not a word of welcome for them on their arrival. They merely had some food given to them, which they ate.

Then, after they had finished their dinner, their mother asked them if the food they had had, had been nice, and they replied that it had been good. "I gave you food to eat which I had befouled (*cum excremento infantis, fratris vestri*); for you two have been lazy to-day; indeed, you never mind anything but play and amusement."

They did not say anything in reply, for they knew that she was repeating one of Va-mî-rô's fabrications, which she believed.

Then the two elder girls talked over matters together, and determined to run away from home. They got their few things together and put their little box on their shoulders; and off they went. They were anxious to go up to the moon, for they felt that their mother would find them out if they remained anywhere on the island.

Now there was hanging down a creeper called *tō-a-ngu-ō*,<sup>28</sup> and they tried to ascend to the skies by it; but it began to break.

"Come, let us try to ascend by the cobweb," said "Industrious."

"Shall we not fare still worse if, as soon as we tread on it, it should snap?" said Tō-pēt-ngen.

"In any case let us try," the other one replied.

So Tō-kën ("Industrious") went up first, and then her sister followed her; and the cobweb did not break.

When they had already got a good distance up, they suddenly remembered that they had forgotten their little basket (made of *ra-foh*, the spathe of the betel-nut); and Tō-kën sent her younger sister to fetch it.

However, she ran across her mother in the house, and was at once stopped. The mother then told Va-mî-rô to keep watch over Tō-pēt-ngen, whilst she herself went in search of Tō-kën.

She found her on the cobweb, not far from the ground, for she was waiting for Tō-pēt-ngen, and had come down some distance to meet her.

The mother caught hold of Tō-kën by the foot, and tugged at it, but she held on fast to the cobweb, and by dint of vigorous kicking she managed to get free from her mother's grip.

Tō-kën's ankle was twisted out of its socket by reason of her mother tugging so at it, and she only accomplished the ascent to the moon by dint of painful perseverance.

But she thought no more of the pain, for she had got up to the face of the moon and was now far away from her insulting and unjust mother.

There she lay down on the surface of the moon and slept, having her box for her pillow. Her ankle

remained out of joint, and Tö-pēt-ngen much missed her, for she was still in the clutches of their insulting mother.

XI.—“CURSES, LIKE HENS, COME HOME TO ROOST”

(*More literally, “The arrow ricochets and strikes the archer”*)

Once upon a time, long, long ago, the people of Chowra came to this island with a canoe for sale, which was purchased by the people of Nök-töl-tui.<sup>27</sup> In exchange for the boat, the people of Chowra got a great quantity of goods—spoons, silver wire, axes and *dahs* (choppers).<sup>28</sup> But they cheated the people of Chowra by shaping pieces of wood to look like *dahs*, and then daubing them over with soot.

The Chowra people did not in the least perceive how they were being deceived; and they took their things and went home. There, at last, they discovered how they had been befooled; perhaps it was through accidentally finding out how very light the *dahs* were.

Now the people of Chowra are wondrous magicians. So they made a ball of *pandanus* (or bread-fruit) paste, and a small canoe to contain it. Then they sent off this toy canoe with the *pandanus* paste aboard it; and it went straight to the village of those people who had deceived them; and it was cast up on the beach there.

A person found it and took it away with him, and all the people of the village, every one, ate some of the paste. There was just one little child that did not eat any; perhaps he was asleep when all the others were eating the *pandanus*. The child was quite small and not old enough to understand things.

Now early next morning a man was going out from an adjoining village to spear fish, and he saw that

child playing all alone on the beach. He thought to himself, "That child is the only one to get up early here this morning," and did not trouble himself any more about the matter.

When he was returning from spearing fish, on his way home, he again saw the child, still playing alone. So he went up into a house, and lit his cigarette; and on looking round saw everyone stretched out stiff and still.

The little child came up the ladder too, and began to suck at his mother's breast, not knowing that she was dead; but the man who had been fishing realized that all the people were dead.

So he picked up the child and went off with him to his own village, "Öt-ra-höön" (or Kemnyus), and hunted around for some people to come and help him to bury those who had thus died all together.

It was as when the bolt that has been shot strikes against a tree, and ricochets, and hits the archer who shot it. We are sure to have falling on our own heads the consequences of our actions; if they do not come at once, they will find us out in the future.

#### XII.—THE TWO WOMEN WHO WERE MAKING TRIPE

Long, long ago two women were once making tripe on some rocks which jutted out a good way into the sea, and were bare at low water, whilst below them lay the deep sea.

One of the women accidentally let her knife drop into the water, and it was immediately swallowed by a fish. That fish, which was called *ka-hû-kô*, had an enormous mouth; it is never seen in these days.

"Quick! jump down, and dive after our knife," said the other woman to her companion. So she dived down after it; and she too went straight down

into the belly of that big fish, just as their pocket-knife had done.

The other woman waited for her companion for a long time, idly playing with a pebble in her hand; and then she said to herself: "Why is she all this time?"

Splash! she too had dived down into the water for the knife; and she too went straight into the belly of that big fish.

The big fish then swam away and went right out into the middle of the ocean.

Now, some considerable time after they had gone down into the belly of the fish, one of the women said: "We are getting hungry."

"Why not cut off some meat for yourself from my liver?" said the fish to them. They took the fish at his word and helped themselves to a considerable quantity of his liver.

"Oh, oh!" said the fish, "are not you two going beyond all bounds in doing this?"

But the women replied: "Oh no, no!"

When they had gone a long distance farther and it was now another day again, they began to get hungry; and again the fish said to them: "Help yourselves again to some more of my liver"; and they did so.

"Oh! is not this going too far?" said the fish again; and again the women cried: "No! No!"

They helped themselves only twice to the liver of the fish, for the fish vomited them up and spat them out on a great rock in the midst of the ocean. The fish then swam away.

After a considerable time the two women spied a shark coming towards the rock; and they were afraid when they saw him come.

"Don't you be afraid, you two," said the shark, "for I have been backwards and forwards looking for you in

the midst of the ocean for many a long day. Come! get up on my back, and I will carry you away."

The women got up on the back of the shark, but they could not keep a firm seat and were continually gliding off; for the fish's back was slippery. So the shark told them to rub his back.

So they rubbed his back, and after that they got up on his back again, and found they had a steady seat. They were carried away by the shark and landed at the very place where they had been making tripe.

They went home, and the fish returned to its own place.

## XIII.—THE MAN WHO BECAME A PYTHON

Long, long ago there were once some people who had gone away to their gardens in the jungle to get the requisite fruit and vegetables for the annual *kun-seū-rō* festival.<sup>29</sup>

The men were on their way back from the jungle hinterland, when they stopped to cut some nuts for themselves to drink,<sup>30</sup> as they were thirsty.

As usual, one man climbed a palm-tree to cut the nuts for the party; and they soon all had as many as they wanted.

His friends drank the nuts, and then got tired of waiting for him, for he remained a very long time up in the tree. So they called out to him: "Come down at once; we want to be going."

But the man who had cut down the nuts for them replied: "You go home now; but I am not going to the village until the day after to-morrow."

Then the man cut open the spathe of a coco-nut flower and ate the flower, for he wanted to have plenty of fat round his intestines.<sup>31</sup>

Somehow or other, by swallowing the coco-nut flower,

he managed to increase the fat round his intestines, and so became a python.

On the next day but one he came to the village, just when the women were in the midst of getting out the fibrous matter from the *pandanus* (or bread-fruit) paste; and he sported indelicately with the women with his tail.

The women were all terrified, thinking it was a "devil" (or evil spirit), and jumped down from the house where they were, and they went straight down the throat of the python.

Now some of the women had big kitchen knives in their hands; and with these they cut for themselves a way out of the belly of the python, and thus escaped.

A number of bystanders, too, cried out and made a loud noise, for the people were still there, not having finished the grating of the food for the *kun-señ-rō* festival. The python then went off into the jungle.

The only occupation of that python nowadays is to swallow the sun and moon occasionally, which is the cause of the eclipses; for having proved himself able to swallow human beings, he sometimes goes in for attempting to swallow the sun and the moon.

#### XIV.—THE STORY OF ÖT-NYA-HUM-KU

Once upon a time there was a man called Öt-nya-hum-ku. He was a wonderful magician (*iō-mi-lūō-nō*). He knew all the thoughts of other people; and when he went out into the rain he did not get wet.

Once he was sent by his wife to cut down and bring home some *pandanus* (or bread-fruit), whilst she got the necessary firewood and water ready for cooking the same.

The man went off into the jungle to cut down the *pandanus* fruit. He climbed the tree, and chopped,

and chopped, and chopped. But he could not manage it; for though he chopped the branch right through, the fruit did not fall, but the branch was joined on again as before. He kept at it all day, but had to go home in the afternoon empty-handed, without his load of *pandanus* fruit.

His wife was very angry with him when he got home, because she felt she had been made ridiculous by gathering and chopping firewood and drawing water, when there was nothing to cook. She was also tired with having had to wait for him so long.

So, after some altercation, his wife herself went along with him that very evening; and both of them started out for the garden to cut down and bring home the *pandanus* fruit. The man went up into the tree this time to show his wife how things stood. He severed the branch of the *pandanus* at one blow of his *dah* (or chopper); but it became glued on again.

When his wife saw what happened, she said: "Certainly this man is indeed a magician!"

So the woman herself then went up into the tree, and chopped down their load of *pandanus*. They then went back, put the pot on the fire, and cooked in it the chopped-up *pandanus*.

Another time there was a wild-pig hunt, and many were following the baying of their hounds. Now Öt-nya-hum-kä happened to be the only man who had a *dah* with him (the others having taken spears or bows and arrows). So it fell to him to clear the way where the jungle was dense and difficult. But no sooner had he chopped through a bough and passed on, than the lopped-off bough joined itself on again to the tree. So the others could not get along; there was no way for them to go; whilst he got on a long way ahead. After a bit, the others gave it up and went home; and he was left alone to get all the profits of their chase.



After a while, he got ill and died; and his body was hung up in a tree; but after some days he came to life again.<sup>32</sup>

Again, in his old age, he died; but before his death he said to those around him: "When I am dead this time, bury me; but I shall remain dead only three days. So look out for the hole down through the ground to where I shall be lying, and dig me up. If you do so, I shall live on; but if you do not hearken to what I say, I shall die outright and return no more."

But the people were unwilling to dig him up, for they were overpowered by the stench; so the magician at last died outright.

#### XV.—THE WICKED SABBATH-BREAKER

(Literally, "*The Man who was Disobedient on the Day of Rest*")

There was once a man who paid no attention to the restrictions of the "rest-days," but went into the jungle on a "rest-day."

The whole night long people had been making "devil-scarers."<sup>33</sup> They had also been singing the *ma-a-fāi* songs and dancing the *ma-a-fāi* dances,<sup>34</sup> and spearing "devils." Then, in the morning of the following day, the evil spirits which had been caught by the witch-doctors (*tō-mi-lūō-nō*) were sent away over the waters on a raft, and the people "rested" the whole day.

Now this man had some plantains in his garden in the jungle, and one bunch was getting ripe, and he was anxious to see how it was going on. So he stole off privately to look at them; for he wished to cut them down. When he reached the place, he got over the fence into the garden, and chopped down the plantains; but no sooner had he done this than he was metamor-

phosed into a road, at the very place where he had cut down the plantains.

Now he was one of those who had been putting up the "devil-scarers" and dancing the *ma-a-fâi* dances during the night; so his face had been daubed (as usual with such worshippers) with red paint; and in consequence of his face having daubs of red paint on it, the road into which he was turned had also streaks or patches of red in it.

His comrades sought for him for many a day, but could not find him, for he was now no longer a man but a road, because he could not resist the temptation to eat plantains whenever he found any red and ripe ones. And that road too is red, because when he was still a man, he had had his face daubed with red paint.

Now those roads do nothing else to-day than wait until the plantains get ripe and red, and then at once they begin to eat them up.

This was the disobedient man, who went into the jungle on a "rest-day."

#### XVI.—WILD PIGS

Formerly wild pigs were very numerous in this island, and once it happened that when a man was travelling alone in the jungle, and without a spear, he unfortunately came across a herd of them. The pigs rushed at him, and ripped him up, and so he died.

As soon as the man's elder brother heard the news, he determined to avenge the man's death by a wholesale slaughter of the wild pigs. So he spent one whole day and night in sharpening his blade (*dah*). Then he tried it on some boughs, and it went right through them at one blow.

Still he was not satisfied, and went on sharpening his *dah*. Then as he sat he turned the blade upwards,

and was examining it, when a fly happened to settle down upon it and was at once cut in two. "Ah! yes!" says he, "now it will do."

Then he went into the jungle, and made out of a bamboo a long handle for his blade, which he fixed securely cross-wise (as a scythe-blade is fixed). Then he got up into a big tree and began to call the beasts, crying out rhythmically: "Fierce wild pigs! Fierce wild pigs!"

A drove of them soon came hurrying along, and got up on the top of one another's backs in their eagerness to get at the man; and they could just manage to touch him. Meanwhile he kept giving stabs with his *dah* into the paunches of the beasts. Flop! flop! flop! and one after another the wild pigs dropped down dead.

Then he repeated the performance, again calling the wild pigs and stabbing them when they came; and so a second herd perished.

A third time he was slaughtering the wild pigs, when the "devil" (or spirit) who owned the pigs said to him: "Stop! That's enough! I cannot stand this."

"Oh no," said the man; "we will have another go." Then, after he had slaughtered the third herd, the man came down from the tree and carried the pigs home to his house. There he made a fire and began to singe the carcasses; for this is often the only cooking the meat gets. But when he turned any carcass over to do the other side, the bristles sprang up again on the side which he had just singed, though he had done it so thoroughly as to have sufficiently cooked the meat.

As this was repeatedly the case, the man gave up the job, and was about to go up into his house when the "devil" (or spirit), who was determined to take vengeance for the slaughter of his pigs, said to the man: "How would you like a snake?"

"Oh!" said the man, "I would swim out into the deep sea."

"Then how would you like a shark?" asked the "devil."

"In that case I should be done for," said the man.

Whilst he was still at the bottom of the stairs a snake bit him; he went up the ladder, and instantaneously dropped over dead as he stepped across the threshold.

## XVII.—THE DISCOVERY OF CHOWRA

Long, long ago the ancients who lived here did not know that there was any other country in the world besides this island; for it is situated in the middle of the ocean.

Now it happened that some people once made a toy canoe from the spathe of the coco-nut. They finished it off very carefully, and fixed sails for it. And after they had done this they put into it a cargo of small yams, and then they floated off the canoe in the direction of Chowra.

The canoe was some months on its journey; but at last it reached Chowra. Someone found it and carried it off.

As soon as the foreigners who live at Chowra saw it, they said: "Perhaps there is some small country over yonder, and this small canoe has been made by those people and laden with yams. Come, let us (in our turn) lade it with a tiny cooking pot and some *kui-löi*." <sup>35</sup>

So the tiny canoe was sent off again, this time in the direction of our country; and it duly arrived with its cargo of a small cooking pot and some *kui-löi*; and the people of these parts found it and carried off the cargo.

"What can we make of this? Perhaps it would

do to boil water in, to cook our food," said they, as they examined the cooking pot. So they put some water into it, and it did not leak. They then put it on the fire and heated the water; the pot did not crack or leak. Then they put some food into it and cooked it.

Then they remarked one to another: "Perhaps there will be some big ones too, where this little cooking pot came from; so let us go in our canoes and find out; for we are badly in want of something to cook our food in."

So, after some months, the people here again sent off the toy canoe, and took their own canoes and followed it; and in due course came to Chowra. But they were just missing the way and going on to Lurö, when the people of Chowra saw them, and beckoned to them to come ashore there. So they went ashore there, and purchased big cooking pots as their cargo for the return journey.

From that time onwards the peoples of Car Nicobar and Chowra have been great friends (or especially associated together); and we regularly take goods there wherewith to buy our cooking pots.

(The above was the very first trip ever made to Chowra.)

#### XVIII.—THE STORY OF THE MAN KILFEÛT

There was once a man who went out, as others had done, in his canoe to a ship to barter nuts for bread, etc. He arrived at the wrong time, just as the ship was making preparations to depart; and before he was aware of it he had got left behind on the ship, and had to remain there; for all his comrades had gone, and had taken all the canoes with them.

His friends afterwards sought for him in vain; but

his parents for long still expected him to turn up; but as months and years passed by they began to feel: "He is surely dead."

Meanwhile Kilfeūt was being carried away to the land of strange foreigners, where he remained a long time, supporting himself by fishing from a boat. He was successful as a fisherman and got comfortably off, and had plenty of money to spend. He also stayed long enough there in the foreigners' land to get married, and to have two children, a boy and a girl, who indeed were now grown fairly big.

One day, however, he got very anxious to get back here to his native land; and he saw a boat which he dragged down into the water. He got together food for himself when he should be out in the open sea, and fresh water for drinking, and some clothing too; and then he was off, leaving his wife and children behind.

He rowed out for some distance and then hoisted up the sails, and made for this island. It was difficult work, as he was the only one to row or to mind the sails, but after many days he was successful in getting here.

It was about midnight when he arrived and beached his boat, and went up into his house. He found that his parents were keeping the Ossuary Feast on his behalf,<sup>37</sup> for the people concluded that he was dead.

He went up to the place and watched the dancing. Then he went to the pens where the pigs were, and he felt their ears, and he said to himself: "These pigs are marked with my own mark."

Then, as he was beginning to get thirsty, he went to cut down some nuts from his own coco-nut trees. Some people who were passing by the foot of the tree where he was cutting said: "Ho! there! who are you that cuts down nuts that are taboo for the

dead?" "What dead man?" asked he. And the people replied, "Kilfeūt." "Why, am I not myself Kilfeūt," said he. And as soon as the people heard this they rejoiced; and all were glad that he had come back home again.

XIX.—STORY OF THE MEN WHO WENT TO A  
DISTANT LAND

Long, long ago some men of Car Nicobar went to the other Nicobar islands to cut and gather nuts.<sup>38</sup>

They were for a few months in Camorta<sup>39</sup>; and when they wanted to come back here they were not able to do so on account of the strong winds and rain. They attempted it, however, and were drifted to a small island.<sup>40</sup>

They were there for a considerable time and had a great deal of sickness. As some got better, others sickened and died; and eventually there were only three survivors.

When they got back here to their own country, they told the friends of their dead comrades, their parents and their children, that the others had died.

So all the people of the place made offerings as propitiations; and their children, parents and wives were very sad. The people, too, chopped up their racing canoes; and the whole village killed pigs by spearing them, as a propitiation to the dead. They invited the people of other villages also; and they all ate of the offerings of the dead.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The scanty Nicobarese loin-cloth. [In my *Census Report*, 1901, I remark, pp. 215-216: "The Nicobarese man at home wears only an infinitesimal loin-cloth, or rather string, fastened behind with a waggling tag. This must have been his garment from all time, because of the persistent reports that these people were naked and tailed from the days of Ptolemy onwards to the middle of the seventeenth century."—R. C. T.]

<sup>2</sup> A band round the head made of the spathe of the betel-nut. [This band may, however, have a common origin with the now white-cotton cincture round the head worn by royalty, courtiers and elders in Burma and Siam.—R. C. T.]

<sup>3</sup> [For a variant form of this story of origin, see *Census Report*, 1901, p. 211.—R. C. T.]

<sup>4</sup> Or, "changed itself."

<sup>5</sup> Literally, "for."

<sup>6</sup> The bark of the *ta-chöi* (*ta-ü-ku*) is used for tying thatch; and the small twigs, which are very white, light and brittle, are used by the witch-doctors to scourge the devils.

<sup>7</sup> The strands of the coco-nut leaf, much used in making brooms.

<sup>8</sup> The annexe of the village by the shore, where the public buildings are.

<sup>9</sup> A village on the south-east coast of Car Nicobar.

<sup>10</sup> I cannot make out the reference here. It can hardly refer to death, for the Nicobarese Hades is not in the under-world, but in the lowest air, especially in certain parts of the jungle, *el-ki-töl-kö-re*.

<sup>11</sup> The "Little One" is the rocky islet, Batti Malv, equidistant from Car Nicobar and the next inhabited island, Chowra, being about twenty miles from each. Its area is about three-quarters of a square mile.

<sup>12</sup> A small village on the south coast of Car Nicobar.

<sup>13</sup> A small bird that lives on insects.

<sup>14</sup> A village on the west coast of Car Nicobar.

<sup>15</sup> The land of spirits and devils.

<sup>16</sup> [Karingas—i.e. Kalingas, Klings—from the northern part of the Madras coast.—R. C. T.]

<sup>17</sup> Two small villages on the east coast of Car Nicobar.

<sup>18</sup> A hamlet on the north coast of the island.

<sup>19</sup> The annexe to the village where the public buildings and cemetery are.

<sup>20</sup> Literally, "companions."

<sup>21</sup> [This is the most important of the festivals of the Car Nicobarese. It is known as *ka-na-an ha-un*. The festival is observed



every third or fourth year and consists of a course of ceremonies lasting from one new moon to another, in the middle of which, at full moon, the pigs are slaughtered and eaten.—R. C. T.]

<sup>23</sup> *Rung Tō-kūchi*, which lies a little to this side of the hamlet of Pasa, on Sawi Bay. The hill takes its name from Tōt-ta-rong and his adventures.

<sup>23</sup> See *ante*, note 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Tō-a-rū*, some rocks on the shore, quite close to the mission at Mus.

<sup>25</sup> Little Andaman is many times larger than Car Nicobar, and some fifty miles distant from it.

<sup>25</sup> *Tō-a-ngu-ō*—i.e. "bitter," from its taste.

<sup>27</sup> A former village on the south coast of Car Nicobar.

<sup>28</sup> [See my *Beginnings of Currency*, *ante*, vol. xxix., pp. 32-33, for the value of a racing canoe in coco-nuts and other articles at Car Nicobar in 1896. The interest in the Nicobarese practice of exchange between islands lies in the fact that a racing canoe is first valued in a large number of coco-nuts, but the payment is actually made in a number of articles each separately valued in coco-nuts, the sum of which amounts to the value of the canoe in coco-nuts. In modern European international trade the same idea is exactly represented by the difference in exchange between two countries.—R. C. T.]

<sup>29</sup> About the beginning of the rains the whole village joins in this quasi-Harvest Festival, or Feast of Pomona, as an acknowledgment of favours received from the unseen powers. The following day they must rest, and, above all things, not go far from their houses.

<sup>30</sup> [The water in Car Nicobar is too brackish for drinking purposes and the drink of the island is coco-nut milk, which is always available. The people are all therefore experts from childhood in climbing a coco-nut tree without undue fatigue.—R. C. T.]

<sup>31</sup> The saliva with which the python covers its victim is supposed to be fat from around its intestines.

<sup>32</sup> Tree-burial is no longer practised in Car Nicobar, though the customs of the inhabitants of the islands of Chowra and Teresa are much the same as tree-burials, the bodies being left in the jungle in the half of a canoe which has been sawn in two.

<sup>33</sup> These in Car Nicobar are merely bamboos decked with bunches of leaves and then erected; though in Nancowry carved figures of crocodiles, etc., are made for this purpose.

<sup>34</sup> The *ma-a-fāi* are the novices for the witch-doctorate, and the songs and dances in which they must partake every night for the year of their novitiate do not differ widely from the secular songs and dances.

<sup>35</sup> A concoction of yams, plantain and coco-nut, made and sold to-day by the people of Chowra.

<sup>36</sup> Probably the old name of Teresa, the next island southwards.

<sup>37</sup> Literally, "were eating his pigs." See *ante*, note 21.

<sup>38</sup> The story is probably historic. The men were most likely induced to leave Car Nicobar by Burmese or Indian traders; if so, the incident must have happened within the last fifty years. It is, however, established in the minds of the people as a story of old time. It is inserted because of its illustration of Nicobarese customs in their mourning for the dead.

<sup>39</sup> The fairly large island lying to the north of Nancowry Harbour.

<sup>40</sup> Probably Tillanchong.

## APPENDIX B

TRANSLATION FROM THE CAR NICOBARESE OF "A SONG IN PRAISE OF A PIG," SUNG TO A DANCE AT THE OSSUARY FEAST (*Ka-na-an Ha-un*)

1. "Where is the piggery? Go on; take me for the first time in my life to Töt-ma-ha-ök-ha-un [the name of the place; its meaning is "the man who did not feed the pigs"], for we are going into the jungle, having been sent by the elders.

2. "I would like to inquire and learn more from the man who is now a rock [he has been long since deceased; see *Folk-Tale*, No. IX., p. 248]—even about that person who was the cause of our being cut off, separated from the others, the ground being rent asunder. For he was (they say) in former times the maker of our roads, which up to his time were very uneven, up and down; and we could not, on account of the roughness of the ground, step it out when one went into the jungle. Such was the work of our ancestor [this last sentence is doubtfully rendered].

3. "I tell of the cleverness of the man who came down step by step from the tree [*i.e.* after the Deluge; see *Folk-Tale*, No. I. p. 240], descending gradually, until his feet touched the ground. Then there sprang up at his command a piggery [with pigs, plantations of coco-palms, and buildings, all complete]. It is fortunate that he tried all kinds of plans and devices; otherwise we should never have existed [literally, "never have been men"]. Because we do not take counsel together [my munshi was not able to see any connection between this line and its context]. What I am saying is true; the name of the place made by our father is Ta-töp. Can you, like the elders, reckon up [or "know"] the generations of

men — everything accurately [like the people of old, the elders]—who told me about the man who cleansed the piggery of Töt-ma-ha-òk-ha-un [*cf.* Hercules and the Augean Stables]?

4. “Is it true what you are saying about the man who turned his ear towards the roar of the sea? and who was strangely drowned in the mire (or “quicksands”), and became food for us to eat [*i.e.* was metamorphosed into a fish; and became the progenitor of the fish we get out in the deep sea]. Ka-rël-ka! [the name of the man in question]. He has no attention paid to him because of his poverty [or “misfortune”]; but he was the discoverer of this land of ours. If it had not been for him, we should not be existent now” [literally, “now be men”]. [The drowning of the man in the quicksands is supposed to have happened near Arong, on the western coast.]



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